

FAR · END

FAR END A Novel

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PATERNOSTER ROW

Far End

I

SHE fell in love with the place at first sight.

At the crook of the high way the gold-yellow road branched off and went up the hill through Eastcote village to lose itself in a narrow path between green grass borders under trees. On either side, built of a grey and golden stone, the cottages stood back in low walled gardens brimming with bright flowers. They stood unevenly, turning to the roadway, now a dormered front, now a high-pitched gable end.

In the June sunshine, grass and trees showed brilliantly green against the gold yellow of the road and the house walls.

At the top of the village, alone under the tall elm tree, was Far End. It looked south, standing, like the cottages, behind a low wall.

The house had the golden walls and mouse grey stone roof of the cottages. It was only a larger cottage. Long, low, with mullioned windows, two on each side of the high jutting gable above the porch ; over them, two flanked, the balled peak of the gable. In the roof a row of four dormer windows with little sliding roofs.

A grass plot was spread before the house with the elm tree in one corner ; and a flagged path went all round it and from the gate to the front door.

Tall spires of blue lupin and larkspur looked over the low wall ; green hanging plants and crimson valerian grew between the stones.

The grass plot turned the corner of the house, and there, under the high west end wall, a row of hollyhocks stood up, wine colour and rose on golden grey. At the back was a larger lawn with a pear tree set at every corner. Here the garden rose in a flight of terraces, each terrace a flat strip of grass backed by a long flower bed under a little yellow wall. Rows of blue delphiniums

and anchusa, purple and white canterbury bells, white and magenta phlox, roses yellow and pink and crimson, snapdragon, flame-coloured and black red, stood up, tier above tier, blazing in the southern sunlight. Tall cone-shaped yew trees made an avenue, standing two and two at the bottom of each flight of steps. Round-headed lavender bushes grew between.

From the top terrace of all a white gate led into a little orchard.

At the east end a garage and outhouses stood in a yard, and behind the yard a long field went up the hill to a terraced tennis court at the top.

The house looked down at her, waiting for her in its eternal peace.

Hilda Courtney loved Far End. She loved the golden house and the grey roof, and the little grey and golden walls, holding back the flood of the bright flowers. She loved the terraces and the orchard and the field. Far End was Christopher Vivart's house, where he and she would live forever when they were married.

This was the first time she had seen it, the first time.

She went all round the garden first, holding Christopher's hand in an ecstasy. The flowers led her on and on.

She ran up the shallow terrace steps. At the orchard gate she turned.

"Now let's go into the house."

Cecily Vivart stood waiting for them at the open door. Cecily was Christopher's sister who kept house for him.

Cecily was young, twenty-two years to Christopher's thirty and Hilda's twenty-four. Her rose-pink face was clear and rose-cool between the golden bosses of her hair. She wore a gown of white linen, clean and cool. She took Hilda's hand and kissed her. And Hilda loved her as she loved the house and garden and as she had loved Christopher, at first sight.

"You dear things. I saw you leaping up the terrace steps like two young goats. Isn't it a lovely garden?"

"Heavenly," said Hilda.

And Cecily led the way out of the square, oak-panelled hall into a long, oak-panelled dining-room.

An oak dresser set with blue and white china plates and copper lustre jugs ; a wide-bowed stone chimney piece opposite the windows, an oak chest by the door, a round gate-legged table in the middle and on it a bowl of crimson roses, making dull wine-coloured reflections in the polished oak. Faded blue and magenta rugs on the floor, dust-coloured curtains by the small square lattices of the windows. Two portraits, one on each side of the chimney-piece : a gentle, beautiful lady, fair, like Cecily, and a soldier with red coat and crimson sash and medals, handsome and dark, like Christopher. Christopher's dead father and mother.

Hilda loved the room.

Cecily gave them tea there, and after tea they went into the drawing-room that filled the whole width of the house, with two mullioned windows at each end, two looking south over the village road, and two looking north on to the terraces.

The room was full of light, light on the elder-flower white painted panelling ; light on the brown gold of polished tables and cabinets ; light on the chintz curtains and covers, a chintz with a gay pattern of red roses and dahlias and powder blue parrots.

Then upstairs to the book-lined study and the bedrooms, and first the room that would be Hilda's and Christopher's, white panelled like the drawing-room, the two wooden railed beds waiting, the old beautiful mahogany furniture, the chintz curtains—rosebuds on a whitish ground—waiting, the slender oval looking-glass waiting for Hilda's face to show in it.

Hilda went to the looking-glass. She thought : " How funny ! This is Christopher's looking-glass, and some day I shall stand before it brushing my hair.

Hilda's hair was bobbed. It lay in little dark slender rings on her honey-white forehead, and bunched out into thicker curls above the nape of her honey-white neck. Under her black eyebrows her eyes were large, and so dark that

the pupils hardly showed in them, they were washed in crystal as if live water shone over them. Her little white, mischievous nose was a shade, a thought broader at the tip than it should have been, but the curves of her mouth were perfect, fine-turned like the edges of a rose-leaf, pure and sweet as a child's, clear red on honey-white. Her body was all long adolescent lines and slender vanishing curves, supple and strong.

Christopher's image showed beside hers in the glass.

He had the closed face of a thinker, thinking secret thoughts; a face clean-shaven, sallow brown, bistrated about the eyes and the roots of his dark hair, a face with the kind, dark eyes she loved, with a slender nose, so slightly aquiline that it was almost straight, the fine bow of the mouth pressing down on to the under lip, the chin rather long and falling straight from the jaw, and square. The face of a man who will not readily give himself away. Only Christopher's eyes, steady, slow,

wide-open, saved his face from the fault of secrecy.

Hilda loved Christopher's face and his tall well-built body.

"She's admiring herself," he said.

"No, only trying to see what you see." She smiled at his face in the glass. "Isn't your chin a little long, darling?"

"Much too long. A damned ugly chin."

"It isn't if I don't think it is. We are what we think each other, aren't we?"

"Then what you see is the most beautiful woman in the world. Cis is the next most beautiful."

Cecily laughed at them.

"Don't talk rot. Hilda's beautiful, if she doesn't mind my saying so, but I'm not. My chin is like yours, too long."

"It isn't. It isn't a bit like his."

"Ask Maurice," said Christopher.

"By the way, I've told Morry to come and play tennis at five. You don't mind?"

"Rather not."

"You're sure Hilda doesn't, her first day?"

"Of course I don't. I want to see him. I've heard a lot about him from Kit."

"So you know how nice he is?"

"I know how nice he is."

Then they went back into the drawing-room. All the windows of the house were open and a sweet warm wind went through it with a smell of roses on the wind.

"What happy rooms," Hilda said. "The house is as heavenly as the garden. It's got all the things in it that I love best. It wouldn't be possible to be anything but good here."

"Cecily is good."

"And your father and mother were good. They *look* good."

"Yes, they were good. I don't know about me."

"I know. You couldn't be anything else, living here all your life. Just good. And happy. There's never been anything but happiness in this house since it was built."

"Well, we're going to be happy in it," said Christopher. "Never anything but happy."

"No," Cecily said. "Father and mother didn't die here. They died abroad of the same fever within a few days of each other. Kit and I stayed abroad for two years after that, and five years ago we came back here. We've been happy. We were very happy before father and mother died. I don't think there ever were such happy children."

"I'm glad you were happy. Oh, I do hope I shan't spoil it all."

"Spoil it?"

A bell rang and Cecily very gently left the room. All her movements were gentle.

Christopher came to Hilda where she sat on the sofa. He put his arm round her and pressed her close to him.

"Why, I never knew I was happy till now. I don't believe I was. I don't care what Cecily says. This is like nothing else on earth. And I'm frightfully glad you like the place. You're quite right about it. It is a happy place. I

don't believe anything ugly ever happened in it. We're going to be awfully happy, Hilda."

"It'll keep us good," said Hilda.

"It'll keep us good."

II

MAURICE CALVERLEY was the man Cecily was engaged to.

She came back into the room, bringing him with her. He was square-built and strong. His face, sunburnt to a pinkish bronze, was square and wide open. His eyes showed very blue in the sunburn. His little tilted moustache (hay coloured like his hair) gave his face an expression of innocent enquiry.

After the first greetings he plunged into apology.

"I say, you know, it's Cecily's fault. She made me come. Sure you don't mind my butting in like this, your first day?"

They assured him.

He sat down and shone at them with his

very blue eyes. You could see that he was full of simple kindness.

“ Is this Miss Courtney’s first visit ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ What do you think of our village ? ”

“ I think it’s adorable.”

“ It is rather charming. And do you like Kit’s house ? ”

“ I love it.”

“ She swears that nobody but good and happy people ever lived in it.”

“ That’s what it feels like. Only beautiful things have happened in it.”

“ As far as I know nothing ever happened in it at all. It hasn’t any history. Good houses, like good women, haven’t any history.”

“ But,” said Cecily, “ people must have died and been born in it.”

“ Only happy people, dying happily,” said Hilda.

“ It’s too happy,” said Maurice. “ It tempts Providence. Something’s bound to happen in it some day. Something unpleasant.”

" Not in our time."

" No, not in your time, of course. You're going to be good and happy all right. You're just the sort."

" How do you know about me ? " said Hilda.

" I don't. But I know Kit. He wouldn't marry a girl who wasn't that sort."

" You *have* faith in him."

" I've known him all my life, you see."

" Has he faith in you ? "

" Of course he has," said Cecily.

" Misplaced. He doesn't know what sort of brute I may be. *You* don't, Cecily. You don't know what you've got hold of."

" I've known you all my life, too."

" That's not such a very long time, old thing."

" Let's go and play tennis," said Cecily.

They went out and up the field to the tennis court at the top.

Maurice was excited.

" I say, Kit, Cecily and I'll play Miss Courtney and you. What do you bet we don't beat you ? Love set."

But they didn't beat them. They were beaten. Cecily was no match for Hilda. She played innocently, like a happy child, with swiftness but no strength. And they wasted time. When the ball flew out of bounds over the high wire netting, Cecily and Maurice ran after it down the slope to see which would find it first. They chased each other up and down the field, shouting with laughter. And Hilda and Christopher stood at the top and laughed at them.

They were all happy.

And when it was over Maurice said, "I forgot to tell you the mater wants you three to come over and dine."

Maurice stayed till it was nearly dinner time, then he ran home, bounding down the village road. They watched him from the gate.

Then Hilda, Cecily and Christopher went over to Eastcote Manor. It stood beyond the crook of the road where its great golden gateway rose up high as a house ; it stood in an inner court and its immense gabled front was all golden like

the village houses only it was built of a finer, smoother stone.

In the great drawing-room Hilda was introduced to Maurice's father and mother. Stately and kind, they received Christopher and Cecily as if they loved them, and Hilda as if they loved her for Christopher's sake.

After dinner Cecily sang, and after the singing they played games, simple-minded, childlike games ; they played like children with innocence and delight.

And when the games were done Maurice walked home with Hilda and Cecily and Christopher. They went arm in arm, slowly, up the dim village road to Far End.

III

CECILY walked in the garden picking flowers. Hilda went with her.

“Cecily,” she said suddenly, “aren’t you frightened sometimes when you think of Maurice?”

Cecily paused to choose between two roses.

“No,” she said. “Why should I be frightened when I think of Maurice? I like thinking of Maurice.”

“Because I’m frightened sometimes when I think of Kit. It’s such a big, dangerous thing to take a man and tie him up to you for life, so that he can never get away.”

“But he wants to be taken. He won’t want to get away.”

“Yes, but it seems awful somehow. You see, he’s so big, so much bigger than me.”

"But don't you see, you silly thing, his big-ness keeps you safe. It means that whatever you do or don't do he'll always understand. His work makes him like that. It's a novelist's job to understand."

"I know. His work. There's another tremendous thing."

"Well, the great thing with dear old Kit is never to come between him and his work. But you wouldn't. You wouldn't."

"No, I wouldn't. I know it must come first. It always shall come first. But, Cecily, what frightens me is, supposing I shouldn't turn out to be what he thinks."

"But you will be. You *are* it. You can't help being it any more than this rose can help being a rose."

She looked at Hilda.

"Hilda, you aren't, by any chance, afraid of Kit?"

"No. No. Never. I couldn't be afraid of him."

"Some women are. They say he can see

through them and it frightens them. They say he's so secret, they never know what he's thinking. Of course, they don't."

"That doesn't worry me. I don't know what he's thinking half the time. But that's what I like about him. That great, secret something that's behind him, in him—that's what fascinates me."

"Provided you don't try to know it and let him see that you're trying."

"I shouldn't try. It's a sacred thing. It's him—him, his own secret self."

"Dear little Hilda. You'll be all right, darling. You needn't be frightened. Kit isn't like other men. He's fixed. He'll never want to get away. So you mustn't mind about tying him. And remember, it's the same for both of you. You're tied too."

"Oh, but I want to be."

"So does he. And there you are. I never think these things about Maurice. He's giving himself to me and I just take him as he is. I know it's all right."

"And so do I know it's all right, really."

"I want one more rose," said Cecily, "and then I've done."

Hilda went back into the house. She went thinking.

His work. His work. That must come first. That was what she adored most, next to his dear outward self and the secret, inmost self that was sacred to her. He had never shut her out from his work. It was always to her that he came, bringing what he had written. She was the first to read it, the first to give a judgment. And, thank God, she could judge. By the mercy of heaven she was intelligent. What could she have done, what could she have been to him if it were not for her intelligence, for her excited, fascinated mind that followed him? That was how she hoped to hold him.

For Hilda was innocent. It did not occur to her that she could hold him in any other way and that her beauty and her sensual charm could count. She did not think of herself as possessed of sensual charm, and she believed

that Christopher was marrying her for her intelligence.

His work. It was going on now. Her visit had caught him in a fit of it, nearing the finish. All morning he shut himself in the study and wrote and wrote. The novel he was writing now was to be the greatest he had ever written. It was what he would like to be judged by. He had sent it to her, chapter by chapter ; she had gone over it line by line and word by word, and written out all that she thought about it. This labour kept him near her when he was away. It was almost as if she had been at his side, speaking to him.

He was right. " The Transgressor " was the greatest novel he had written yet. When it was done he was going to read it aloud to them, to Hilda and Cecily and Maurice.

IV

It was finished. They lay on the floor and listened. The reading took three evenings, and on the third evening came the discussion.

It was superbly written, they said, superbly done. There could be no two opinions about that. But——

Would Bertrand, being what Bertrand was, have left Diana ?

Even Hilda wondered.

"But you're striking at a vital situation. That's the whole story. If that goes, if Bertrand couldn't have left Diana, the whole thing goes."

"Yes," said Cecily, "but would he? He was nice."

"That was how he managed it," said Maurice.
"He was so nice that the other woman couldn't

keep off him. He was so nice that she had to have him."

"But nice to that degree," said Hilda, "how could he? Besides, he loved Diana."

"He loved Diana, but his body loved Maisie," said Christopher.

"He shouldn't have paid any attention to his body."

"Oh well, people do. And Diana no longer interested him in that way, which was partly Diana's fault and partly his. But, Cecily, you think he wouldn't have left her?"

"I think he wouldn't, but that only means that I know Kit wouldn't and Maurice wouldn't."

"That only means that I wouldn't leave Hilda. Diana was not Hilda."

"Poor little Diana," said Cecily.

"What do you think, Hilda?"

"I think that, as Bertrand wasn't Kit or Maurice, he might have left her. Diana made herself pretty unpleasant. You might almost have said she was asking for it, and Maisie was rather a dear."

"Precisely. Diana was Diana. It's no good taking my characters for what they aren't, you must take them for what they are. Bertrand certainly isn't me or Morry, still, I don't believe even Bertrand would have left Hilda or Cecily."

"Do you think he'd have gone back to Diana if she'd have let him?"

"Probably, since he had the grace to feel remorse—Diana's coldness and pride were worse than Bertrand's technical unfaithfulness."

"'Technical' 's good," said Maurice.

"I mean technical. Technical unfaithfulness, unfaithfulness of the body—it was no more than that—is different from entire unfaithfulness of body and soul."

"I'm afraid, old man, you've written a thoroughly immoral book."

"I haven't. I'm not defending Bertrand, God knows I'm not defending him. I'm only representing him. I don't make the poor beggar out worse than he was, that's all. Take the last lines of the book." He read: "'Sometimes in the summer twilight, when he was

sitting in the garden, the ghost of the living Diana would come to him and sit beside him, and he would feel her hand in his and see her eyes shining at him and hear her voice. Or sometimes she would go up the garden paths gathering her flowers, and his eyes would follow her, and his heart would strain with an intolerable longing. And her ghost would be nearer to him than the living Diana, and more to him than Maisie in the flesh. At such moments he would be faithful to her in his heart.'"

"That's all very well," said Cecily, "but I wish he hadn't left her."

"Then you wish I hadn't written my book."

"I almost do," said Cecily.

V

IN the next month, July, Hilda and Christopher were married. They went to Norway for their honeymoon and came back to Far End in August. The place was the same except that trees and grass showed a darker green against the yellow roads and yellow walls.

Cecily was at Far End ; she was to stay there till she married Maurice. Maurice had got a secretaryship which kept him in London ; with his salary and the allowance his father made him they would have enough to live on. They were to be married in the late autumn.

Cecily sat in the drawing-room, sewing. Her head was bent over her work, and Hilda could see the parting, fine in the thick-springing hair, that went from her forehead over her head

to the nape of her slender neck. Her hair showed dull ash colour there ; it shone in the plaited golden bosses above her ears. She was so pretty, so pretty that you could have loved her for that alone.

Cecily looked up.

“ Hilda, are you sure you don’t hate having me here ? ”

“ I love having you.”

“ Don’t you want to be alone with Kit ? ”

“ I am alone with him. I think of you as a part of Kit.”

“ That’s sweet of you. All the same I must be a nuisance sometimes. Aren’t I a nuisance ? ”

“ Never.”

“ Mrs. Calverley wants me to go and stay with them, so as to leave you and Kit by yourselves for a bit.”

“ I don’t want you to go. Far End’s your home. There isn’t any other place.”

“ Yes, but you ought to be alone with Kit.”

“ Oh no, I don’t make a god of him to that extent.”

" But you make a god of him."

" Yes, and if my god wants to have his sister with him he shall have her. Even if I didn't want you, and I do."

" But it'll be for ages. We aren't going to be married till November."

" My dear, if it was for ever I shouldn't be sorry. And I know Kit wouldn't be. Why can't you believe me? Don't you know what a valuable person you are? "

" I don't *feel* valuable."

" Well, you ought to, when you've got Maurice. And when you've got Kit and me. As if we'd care for anybody who wasn't—valuable."

" I know. That's what I keep on telling myself. And then I like myself a little better."

" If you knew how *we* liked you."

" How can you like me? You've known me such a little, little time. Just this June."

" I fell in love with you at first sight, as I did with Kit. So you don't like me because it's such a little time? "

" I do. I do. I fell in love, too. Don't

you know I fell in love with you ? ”

“ I thought you liked me.”

“ I hardly ever like people without loving them. Either I love them or they don't exist for me. Such heaps of people don't exist. You know there are very few people here in Eastcote ; there's nothing but the Manor and the Vicarage and one or two farms. I wonder how you'll really like it, after London.”

“ After London it's divine. I always hated London. I shall never want to be anywhere in the world but here.”

“ But people ? Won't you want people ? ”

“ No, I won't. I don't care who isn't there so long as Kit is.”

“ Well, I've always loved it. But then I've always had Kit and Maurice. I never wanted anybody else.”

“ We're rather like each other, I think.”

“ I should love to be like you.”

“ Perhaps that's why Kit liked me, because I was like you.”

“ I expect it's because you're like yourself,

always like yourself. Hilda, you'll keep Kit for ever if you keep on being like yourself."

"And if I didn't keep on——"

"But you will, you will. Never think that you won't. You mustn't think it."

"I won't. I've got such a silly mind, always imagining possibilities. Insane possibilities."

"Impossibilities. There you're not like me. I never imagine anything. I take what comes and I'm glad when it's beautiful."

"Oh, I'm glad too. I'm frightfully happy. Perhaps that's why I like to play with the idea of unhappiness, because I don't believe in it."

"I shouldn't play with it. The idea of unhappiness is unhappy. Why be anything but happy?"

"But I'm not. I'm not anything but happy. Happy every minute. That's what I mean, that I can afford my play."

"We can't any of us afford it."

"You don't mean imagining things could make them happen?"

"No, I don't think I mean that exactly. I

mean that in time, if you did it often, it might spoil your taste for happiness."

"It doesn't. I come back keener. It sharpens my taste for happiness by contrast."

"Then it's trying to get a thrill beyond the thrill. You'll blunt the edge of your mind that way, darling. Much better never imagine things, like me."

"I don't think I'm quite so innocent as you are, Cecily."

"Innocent? *Me* innocent?"

Cecily opened blue eyes that were innocence itself.

"Yes, a saint. A lamb, a woolly lamb. Jumping about in a field of daisies."

"Well, when you are happy why not be content, like me? I never look ahead, I never look behind."

"But the present, this instant minute's such a little bit of things."

"It's enough. I don't want more. Just this instant minute while I sew."

"But you do want more. You want the day

when Maurice comes down. You want the day when he marries you. You do look ahead."

"Only to November."

"And after that? Don't you look beyond that and wonder what it'll be like?"

"No. I only know that when it comes it will be beautiful. More beautiful than anything that has been yet. But I can't imagine it. I don't want to imagine it. I want it to come all fresh and wonderful so that it'll take me by surprise. You can't imagine heaven."

"Dear lamb."

It was then that Christopher came into the room.

"Oh, Kit, this silly kid says she doesn't want to stay with us. She wants to stay at the Manor."

"I didn't. I don't. I only thought you and Hilda might want the place to yourselves a bit."

"We don't. We haven't any secrets, and if

we had we could go and tell them in the garden. Besides, we're quite unabashed when you're there. And anyhow you leave us alone enough."

"She won't believe that we want her."

"Of course we want her. Why, dear kid, if there was one thing beastly about marrying Hilda it would have been leaving you, supposing we'd left you. Hilda and I have all our lives to be alone together in."

"You do want to be alone?"

"That's a nasty question. How can I say I don't and how can I say I do? I don't want you to go. We should both of us hate it if you went. You've just got to stay till Maurice comes and takes you away."

"I should want to be alone with Maurice."

"Well, you *will* be alone with him. We shan't come and stay with you."

"Oh, Kit, I'd love it if you did."

"You wouldn't, you lying kid; that's where we're different."

"But think how awful it would be for me

stopping here if I didn't want you to stop with me ? ”

“ Well, you jolly well don't. So that's the end of it.”

The end of it was that Cecily stayed on, only going over to the Manor for week-ends when Maurice came down.

And Hilda and Christopher were happy. They were happier because Cecily was there. Her happiness reflected theirs and gave it back to them doubled. And, because she loved them she set them in a happy light and kept them there, and they saw themselves and each other as they were in Cecily's eyes, beautiful. She left them as much alone as it was good for them to be, and when she was with them she joined them closer.

“ I believe,” Hilda said, “ we shouldn't like each 'other half so much without her. She makes us look so nice to each other.”

She was part of Far End, sitting quietly in the quiet rooms or going up the garden path, gathering her flowers, or playing with

Maurice in the field, shouting with laughter, laughter that rang in their hearts and echoed in their memories long after she was gone.

She and Maurice were married in November.

VI

IN the November twilight Hilda and Christopher sat in the study and talked. Christopher's book had come out that month. They had read over the reviews together. Most of them, all the ones that mattered, were laudatory, but not, Hilda thought, too laudatory. Even where they said, "Mr. Vivart has genius" (one or two of them had gone so far) she felt that there was not a word too much. She could have bettered all those rich sentences of praise. And she was indignant with the inferior critics who omitted to say that "The Transgressor" was an immortal masterpiece.

She said, "The beast doesn't know what he's talking about. It's a great book, Kit; why can't he say so?"

" I suppose because he doesn't think it."

" Then," said Hilda, " he's no more fit to review books than that cat."

The blue Persian was curled up in her lap. Christopher's cat. She was glad that Christopher's cat came to her. Hilda longed for the approval of every man, woman and animal that she met.

" I say, let's go up to town to-morrow for a week and see Grevill Burton. I'd like to know what he thinks of it."

She knew what he wanted. He wanted to go up to London and taste his success at the living source of it. *There* were the people who knew, the people who counted, the people who could deal out success or failure with a word. He wanted the long appraisal, the excited discussion among experts. He wanted to see precisely what had happened to him. After all, her admiration was not enough for him, how could it be? It came first, but it didn't come afterwards or all the time. And who was she beside Grevill Burton?

She looked up uneasily.

"Yes, of course we must go. But I'm frightened."

"What are you frightened at?"

"I'm afraid that if you go you'll want to stay. And I couldn't bear, I simply could not bear to leave Far End."

"Leave Far End?"

"Yes. But if you want it, you must. I wouldn't stand in your way for anything on earth."

"Who's talking of leaving it?"

"Well, I thought, perhaps, now that you're such a thundering success, you'd want to live in London. After all, anybody who's anything goes there sooner or later. And for a writer——"

"My dear, I've been writing for five years and I haven't wanted to leave Far End yet. Why should I want to leave it suddenly, now?"

"Because now it's different."

"It isn't. Nothing's different. I'm not. I should say my leaving Far End was the most unlikely thing in the world. Why, don't you

know, there's nowhere else that I can work. When I get back here after London the peace is like the peace of God."

"Yes, isn't it?"

"Besides, so long as you'd hate to leave Far End, it can't happen."

"I would hate it. There's no other place in the world where I want to be."

"Then that's all right. We're agreed on that point."

"You see, there's something that it does to you."

"I know. I feel it the minute I get inside the gate. I feel it in the village. It is the peace of God."

"And the beauty, Kit, the beauty. It's like nothing else on earth. If I left it it would haunt me and make me mad with homesickness."

"I'm glad you feel about it like that."

The twilight deepened. Hilda slipped to the floor and sat at Christopher's feet with her shoulders resting against his knees. She liked to feel the firm pressure of his body, holding her

up. She liked to feel his hand on her head, stroking her hair.

"Shall I light the lamp?" he said.

"No, not yet. You don't want it?"

"No. No. I like being like this. Are you comfy?"

"Very comfy."

"Lean harder, I don't feel you at all."

She leaned harder.

"That's better."

A long pause. Then: "Hilda, I want to tell you about an idea I've got."

"An idea? For another novel?"

"Yes. I want to write a philosophical novel. I'm tired of passion, the passion of sex. I want to take the passion for truth."

"Truth?"

"Yes, truth. Ultimate, metaphysical truth."

"That ought to be good. But shall I understand it?"

"I'll do it so that you'll understand it. So that anybody not a born fool could understand it."

“ You and I’ll like it. But will it be interesting to other people ? ”

“ It ought to be. Anything that human beings are passionately interested in ought to be interesting to human beings. That’s assuming that my characters are human beings.”

“ They would be.”

“ Well, it’s the sense of passionate interest I’ve got to get and carry over. I think I’ve got it, I’ve got my professor. He’s an Oxford man, New College. And there’s a war going on between idealists and realists.”

“ What are idealists and what are realists ? I know and yet I don’t know.”

“ Idealists are the fellows who say the world arises in consciousness and has no existence outside it. And realists are the chaps who say that the world arises outside consciousness and is independent of it. Idealists swear that the world exists because we know it, realists swear that we know it because it exists. These are the two great philosophical theories, and they are implacable and irreconcilable. There never

was an attempt to adjust their relations that didn't fail."

"And which are you? I think I'm a realist."

"I suspend my judgment. I couldn't write my book if I didn't. I should get too excited about the theory I believed in."

"Never mind that. Get on with the story."

"Well, when it starts, the old boy's an idealist, wedded to idealism. He's written a book on it. And a series of lectures has been arranged in America, a regular tour of the States. He's going to get a thundering lot for them. It's the first bit of luck that's ever happened to him in all his wretched life. And they need it because they're poor. And he's going to be paid for his book, too. He's quite celebrated.

"I ought to tell you that he's got a little wife who doesn't understand his philosophy. And he's got a woman secretary who does. The secretary adores him and he's getting platonically attached to her. Arm stroking—that kind of thing. And the little wife is unhappy, only she

doesn't show it. She rags him when he talks philosophy at meal-times."

"Would he?"

"Yes, it's a beastly habit he's got. The secretary makes him do it. She leads him on and draws him out to show his wife what an intelligent companion she is to him. I've got a scrap of dialogue. I'll read it. But I shall have to light a candle first."

He got up and lit the candle and they settled themselves again. He read from a note-book.

" 'The conversation degenerated.' (The professor has been talking metaphysics.) 'Mrs. Broadbent began it, facetiously.

" 'Can I offer you a slice of your own consciousness?"

" 'My own——"

" 'The professor was half asleep, his mind wrapped in the comfortable blanket of his book.

" 'Well, I suppose you'd say that pudding was your consciousness."

" 'The professor woke up. "That pudding

exists in and for my consciousness and yours and Miss Fletcher's."

" " "Then," said Mrs. Broadbent, "there are three puddings."

" " "Precisely. Your pudding, my pudding, and Miss Fletcher's pudding."

" " "Yet you eat it."

" " "The eating is in and for my consciousness too."

" " "My eating isn't."

" " "No. It is not. Only the champing of your teeth and the sounds of swallowing in your throat."

" " Miss Fletcher smiled transcendently.

" " "I don't make sounds of swallowing in my throat. And if there are three puddings how can you tell they're the same pudding? "

" " "Because our consciousness functions in the same way. Otherwise there are as many puddings as there are people in the room to look at them."

" " "How does *your* slice come out of *my* pudding? "

“ “ “ It doesn’t. It comes out of all the puddings.”

“ “ “ Then,” said Mrs. Broadbent surprisingly, “ you’ll eat them all.” ”

“ If you can keep it up like that,” said Hilda.

“ But I can’t. It’s deadly serious in places. Truth’s a downright serious matter.”

“ Go on.”

“ Well, everything’s ready and they’ve settled that Mrs. Broadbent is to be taken to the Riviera on the proceeds of the United States tour, to make up for the professor’s philandering with Miss Fletcher. The professor’s book is to come out in the autumn, and Miss Fletcher’s name is conspicuous among the acknowledgments of help received. Generous praise of Miss Fletcher, who thus gets her own little niche in the great man’s temple. Everything’s ready, when the professor unfortunately reads a book by a young brother philosopher (his friend) and is converted to realism. He goes over with a rush.”

"But would he go with a rush? Wouldn't the change be rather gradual?"

"In a way it is. He's begun to wobble before he reads his friend's book after reading his own. Before that he's had a dim unpleasant feeling of insecurity, barely conscious, and he fights it. That's why he is so vehement in his book. The friend's book simply gives him the final push.

"And now there's a problem for the professor. Can he go on with it? Can he publish his book and give his lectures? Can he get up before an audience and make statements that he no longer believes to be true? Can he publish statements he no longer believes to be true?

"He decides that he can't. The book must be suppressed and the lectures must be cancelled. He explains his difficulty to the secretary. She doesn't see it. First of all, she's so soaked in the professor's thought that she can't see how realism can be true. She can't see how he, of all people, can think it true. And supposing that he does think it, she advises him to publish

his book and give his lectures first and change his mind afterwards. Then nothing will be lost. She means that she won't lose her niche in the temple of fame and the fun and distinction of going over with the professor to the States. What she cannot stand is the suppression of the Introduction, which means the suppression of her name. And when he insists she turns on the poor old thing and abuses him.

"The professor is shocked at her attitude and at the immorality of her suggestion that he should lecture and publish first and change his mind afterwards. She is suggesting that he, whose first object, the object of his adoration, is the truth, should lie, lie for a sum of money.

"And he goes to his wife and tells her all about his terrible situation, and the decision he has made and how he had to make it. She doesn't understand his philosophy, but she does understand that. And she says, 'But of course, of course you must give it all up, dear. Truth's truth.'"

"And I leave him sitting with her, holding her

hand, perfectly happy, with the wreck of his dreams around him.

“What do you think of it?”

“I think it will be splendid if it comes off.”

“If——”

“Oh, but it will. Only, you know, you’ll be deliberately limiting your public. Everybody isn’t going to like that book.”

“I don’t care. I can’t help that. It’ll be written for those who do like it; and for myself first and for you. You’re going to like it. Say you’re going to like it.”

“I’m going to love it. And what’s more I’m going to do your typing. I’ve learnt how. You didn’t know I’d learnt, did you? I did that in London before we married.”

“I say, how ripping of you.”

“I’m going to be so useful that you can’t do without me, so that whatever I do you won’t get a divorce.”

“I can’t do without you any way. But would you mind sitting still, by yourself, a bit? I believe I could write that first chapter.

You've made me see it. Heavens, what should I do if you didn't believe in me ? "

" You'd believe in yourself."

" Would I ? I wonder. Yes, I suppose I would in a way. But it would be a different way."

" Go and work. I'll sit as still as a mouse. Or I'll go away if you'd rather."

" Don't go away. It helps me to have you."

She got a book and read, sitting a little away from him, still as a mouse. It was wonderful that she should help him, so that he didn't shut her out, as he so easily might have done, under the hard tyranny of his work. She was the first, the first ; there was nobody else so near to him. It was wonderful.

And yet there was something in him that kept her away. When he wasn't working, when he sat silent and hidden from her, she wondered, What is he thinking of that keeps him silent and hidden ? What is it, what is it that he hides ? There was something dark in him that she couldn't see, something deep that

she couldn't fathom, something that in their kisses escaped her, in their embraces fled from her arms, and in the closing of their passion shut her out from him. And she wanted to see, she wanted to sound all his depths, to draw his soul down to her in an embrace. She was consumed with her longing to know the hidden secret soul of the man she worshipped.

And he remained inscrutable.

· VII

CHRISTOPHER'S novel, "The Idealist," was finished in the spring and came out in May of nineteen fourteen. Its success was greater than they had anticipated. The reviewers acclaimed it as Mr. Vivart's finest work, far and away better than "The Transgressor." Its sales increased steadily up to the end of July, when they suddenly stopped dead. The public had something else to think about.

On the first of August Maurice came down to Eastcote for the week-end, bringing the first rumour of England's part in the War.

"But England won't be dragged into it," said Hilda.

"Won't she? She can't keep out of it. Not with any decency. All the leaves are

stopped and fellows are going back to their regiments and batteries all over the place. It's going to be the most terrific bust-up of everything."

"I can't believe it."

"You'll jolly well have to. You know what it will mean, Cecily?"

Cecily's face was suddenly white.

"I shall have to join up and go out."

"I know," she said. And they were silent.

Christopher and Hilda looked at each other. They were silent too.

Then came the ultimatum, and England was swept into the War. The day after, Maurice and the son of the gardener at Far End volunteered, and within the week they had joined up.

Then Christopher came to Hilda.

"Hilda," he said, "you know I shall have to go out too."

"No," she said. "No, I won't let you go."

Her voice was strange, hard and strained and thin, the voice of another woman.

"It's no use saying that. I've got to go."

" You haven't. There are heaps of others. Why should *you* go ? "

" If for no other reason, because of the others. How can I see Maurice go, and Scarrott go, and stay behind ? "

" Let them take people that can't do the things you can do."

" My dear, the things I've done are going to matter precious little in the next five years. My going out is the only thing that matters. It's the only way I can count. Would you like me to be less of a man than Scarrott ? "

" You wouldn't be less of a man to me."

" To everybody else I should be."

" I don't care for everybody else."

" I do, though."

" Then it's moral cowardice ; you're afraid not to go because of what people will think of you."

" You may call it moral cowardice if you like ; I should say it was just common decency."

" I didn't mean it. I didn't mean it, darling."

I don't know what I'm saying. Oh, don't you care for me a little bit? How can you bear to hurt and frighten me, if you care?"

"I care so much that I don't want you to despise me, which is what you would do if I stayed behind."

"I wouldn't. I wouldn't."

"You think you wouldn't, but you would, darling, in your heart."

"My heart wouldn't do anything but be glad you were safe."

"Safe?"

"Yes, safe."

"Hilda, when Maurice told Cecily he'd have to go, all she said was, 'I know.' Don't you remember? She turned as white as that wall, but she never said another word."

"It's nothing to me what Cecily feels about it. All I know is that I'd die, I'd go out myself and be killed, rather than let you go. I won't let you go."

"You can't stop me, sweetheart. Why are you frightened when Cecily isn't frightened?"

" Because I'm not Cecily. And I know you'll be killed."

" Why should I be killed more than anybody else ? "

" Because everybody's being killed. Look at the lists."

" All the more reason why I should go."

" Oh, what can I do ? What can I say to stop you ? "

" Nothing. You're not the only woman, darling. Think of Cecily. Do you suppose it's easier for her to let Maurice go ? "

" Poor little Cecily. But she doesn't think of things. She really doesn't, and I do. While Cecily's sitting peacefully waiting for Morry to come back, I should be imagining a thousand horrible deaths."

" You imagine things that never happen."

" But it will happen. It will happen. Just because I love you it'll happen. We were too happy."

" Dearest, if you love me, don't make it harder for me. It isn't easy for me."

"If I could, I'd make it so hard that you couldn't go."

"You mean you'd drag me down and leave me without a shred of honour? If you could, you'd make me hate you."

"Even if you hated me you'd be safe. You'd be here living in the world and I should be glad. Even if you hated me."

"You wouldn't. You don't know yourself. You'd hate me if I gave in to you. When you came to understand that the whole honour of the country is in this war. And you will understand it. You'll be one of the first. If you aren't, you're not what I think you."

"I told you I wouldn't be. Now you know."

"No. You'll see it all right after I'm gone, and you'll write and tell me so. Or perhaps you'll see it before I go."

"Then you're going?"

"Of course I'm going. What do you think? You didn't really suppose you could stop me?"

"I don't know what I supposed. I thought you loved me."

" You know I love you. That's partly why I'm going. So that you may always think——"

" Think what ? "

" Why, that I just went. Don't imagine I want to go. It's going to be damnable, every minute of it. There won't be any glory, there'll be filth, every sort of filth, there'll be fleas and there'll be lice, and I shall be frightened, trembling with funk half the time."

" You won't be."

" Ah, there you are. You can't bear to think of your husband trembling with funk. Then how can you bear to think of him stopping at home ? "

" That's different."

" It isn't different. Look here, if I didn't believe this was a righteous war I wouldn't go into it."

" It isn't a righteous war ; it's a wicked filthy, cruel, detestable war, like all the wars that ever were. If people would simply be sensible and refuse to fight—no government could make a whole country fight against its

will—if every single man would simply get up and say he was damned if he was going to fight, then they couldn't have their beastly old wars any more. I don't believe there's any more honour in fighting than in not fighting."

"Well, my dear girl, don't believe it. It happens to be *my* honour, that's all. And I wish you were on my honour's side."

"I can't help it."

"No, poor child, you can't help it."

"You see, I love you so. I can't love your honour more than you."

"If you only could——"

"I can't, and there's an end of it."

"Really an end of it? Thank God for that."

Then Hilda burst into tears. She ran out and upstairs to her room where she lay on her bed, crying, till Cecily came to her.

Christopher had met Cecily in the hall.

"I say, Cecily," he said, "I wish you'd go up to Hilda. She's got the War on her nerves and she's frightened. She's upstairs, crying her heart out."

And Cecily went to her and took her in her arms.

“Don’t cry, darling. It’s no good crying.”

“I m-m-must cry. I can’t stop it.”

“Well, cry if you like, then. I could cry, only I don’t, because it would hurt Morry.”

“How could it possibly hurt Morry?”

“It’ll hurt him if I’m weak. It’ll take a little of his strength away and make it harder for him.”

“You think I’ve made it hard for Kit?”

“I’m afraid you have. Don’t you see that they want all their strength now, and if we fail them——”

“Yes. I’ve failed him. I was a brute to him, Cecily. I tried to stop him going out I said it was all moral cowardice his going, because he was afraid what people would think about him if he didn’t go. And when he talked about his honour I as good as told him I didn’t care about his honour. And now he hates me. He said he’d hate me if I stopped him going.”

"He only said that because he knew you couldn't stop him."

"But he does hate me. He must. I was a devil to him."

"He doesn't. He doesn't. He understands. He knows it was only your love for him."

"He seemed to think it was a queer way of showing it."

"Well, so it is. But it was one way."

"How could I love him and let him go away and get killed and never say a word?"

"Because—oh, you've got to see it his way, darling. It is his honour. You know it is. You'd hate it if he didn't go."

"No. That's it. I suppose I haven't any honour, but I shouldn't hate it. I'd be glad, so glad."

"Glad to see him dishonoured? Glad to see him unhappy, fretting his heart to go? My dear, you couldn't bear it a minute. You'd be the first to tell him to go."

"I wonder——"

"I know. It's only because he's going so

soon that you're up against it. I know what it is, Hilda ; I went through it all in one second when Morry told me. I would have tried to stop him then, but I daren't. I daren't come between him and his honour. That's the unforgivable sin."

" I've sinned it. And he won't forgive me."

" Kit will. Morry wouldn't. I should have taken a worse risk than you. Morry wouldn't understand. Kit understands. He'd forgive anything to anybody who loved him."

" Do you think he'd come to me if you asked him ? "

" Of course he would."

And Cecily went downstairs and sent Christopher to Hilda.

He came and put his arms round her and kissed the tears out of her eyes.

" Poor child, poor little Hilda. It is rough on you."

" Oh, Kit, if only I hadn't said those awful things to you."

" What awful things ? "

"That about moral cowardice."

"Oh, *that*. Well, I daresay there was a bit of truth in it. Only if there wasn't a soul in the world whose opinion I cared a damn about, I'd still go."

"I know you would. Then there was what I said about your honour."

"What did you say about my honour?"

"I said I didn't care about it."

"Who cares if you did? Darling, it doesn't matter. Nothing matters. I knew you wouldn't hit out like that if you didn't care so damnably."

"That's it. It's because I care so frightfully and I was frightened. And now I won't say a word to stop you. You shall just go. And I'll try and bear it. I'll try not to be frightened any more."

"Poor little Hilda. Dear little Hilda. She was frightened, was she?"

"Yes. It was just funk. Pure funk. You aren't responsible, are you, when you're in a funk?"

"No," said Christopher, "of course you're not."

Then Hilda sat up and dried her eyes.

"What a good thing it was," she said, "that your book came out before this happened."

"Oh, my book ; that's another of the things that don't matter any more."

"That's the saddest thing you've said yet."

"Not sad, Hilda. Not sad at all."

And Christopher joined up and went into camp where Maurice was on Salisbury Plain. And for a long time there was nothing but his letters. Letters that told of the life of the camp, its felicities and infelicities, of drilling and bombing and musketry. Delightful, conceited tales of Kit's proficiency. He was so proud of himself when he was first in anything.

"I do believe," Hilda said, "he's more proud of his bombing than he is of all his books." Nothing more amusing than Kit's surprise that he should be so good.

"I was most horribly afraid," he wrote,

“ that I should be a rotter. But no. The things I thought would be so difficult are as easy as walking when you try, and I’ve lost all my respect for the people who can do them. The worst of it is that there’s no time in the day to read, and you’re too tired in the evenings to do anything but sit about and smoke, even if you could read in the row that goes on. You get pretty sick of the ragging, but it’s all very simple-minded and not a bit unkind. Some of these chaps are like children. It doesn’t do not to pretend to be amused at their little jokes. I pretend to be amused half the time. It pays, for then they leave you alone a bit.

“ Not a bad life if you could give up the hunger and thirst for literature, and for beauty, in all this ugliness. That’s the worst of literature and beauty ; they spoil you for leading a life as simple as this is. Tell me all you’ve been doing, and what you’ve been reading and what you think of it. And send me a book or two. Any books you like yourself.

“ And don’t work too hard at the swabs and

things. Go out into the open air and keep fit. And tell Cecily to."

Cecily was staying at Far End. And she and Hilda worked all morning and afternoon at the Manor, making swabs and bandages and bed-jackets, until the Calverleys turned the Manor into a Home for Convalescent Soldiers, and the Eastcote War Hospital Supply Depot was moved to Far End. Hilda and Cecily were glad of the dull mechanical work that kept them from thinking.

And every now and then, at long intervals, Christopher and Maurice came on leave. And they would talk, talk of the books they read, of the books that Christopher would write some day, of the state of the country, of funny things that happened at the camp, of the villagers and of the War, the war which looked now as if it would end in defeat for the Allies, and now as if it would never end at all. Always, under whatever they said or did or were thinking, ran the thought of the War, dark with blood and terror.

And first Maurice went out to it and then

Christopher. And Hilda and Cecily and the Calverleys lived in fear. Fear that they dare not speak of to each other, fear that haunted their nights and darkened the day. Only, whereas Cecily fought her fear and refused to let her mind dwell openly on the War, Hilda brooded. She imagined every form of horrible death for Kit and Morry. In her mind they were wounded mortally, mutilated, blinded by fire, they died in torments every hour.

And nineteen fourteen passed and nineteen fifteen. From second lieutenants Christopher and Maurice became first lieutenants, and from first lieutenants, captains. They were different. Maurice went through the War laughing, and with a supreme intolerance for the man who grouched. He laughed when the bullets riddled his tunic, when rations ran short, and when he fell over the corpse in the dark in No Man's Land. He laughed when he went over the top. "Anyone would think, Calverley," said the man who grouched, "that you enjoyed the War."

"I don't enjoy it," said Morry. "I hate the stink and filth of it as much as you do. I don't like jabbing bayonets in Germans' stomachs. And I can't think why your face makes me laugh. A month-old corpse would be a more cheerful sight." Only when he got a letter from Cecily he would become suddenly sad and remain thoughtful for some time after. Thinking about Cecily, and wanting her, spoiled the War for Morry.

Christopher went through it doggedly and silently, with endless revulsions and disgusts, and smiling a hard ironic smile. He didn't grouse, and if he didn't laugh he smiled. And he made light of the War in his letters home so that Hilda should never really know. He understood her attitude now that he knew what she would have saved him from. Poor little Hilda. She must have seen it all. No wonder she went mad. He thought of her protest as a madness that had passed and of her resignation as something terrible and fine. Poor little Hilda, so wild in the beginning and so brave, so

magnificently brave in the end. No tears, no weakness when he put her arms away from him, to go. Only a white face with a shaking smile on it. Whenever he thought of Hilda he saw her with that tragic smile.

And her joy over his medals. Christopher had won the D.S.O. and the Military Cross. Poor reckless, laughing Morry had won nothing.

"Anybody," said Kit, "can win anything. Morry ought to have got something. He's a better man than I am."

By a lucky chance they got their first leave together, in the summer of nineteen fifteen, leave so short that they were hardly welcomed before they were gone.

They wouldn't talk much about their life in the trenches, for what was the use of making everybody miserable? Of course, they said, it isn't a picnic, but you can struggle through. You get used to it (only they never did), there was even a sort of queer ecstasy, they said, in going over the top (only it didn't last). "We'll tell them about the ecstasy," Morry said.

"They'll like that; but we won't tell them about the lice."

"And did you funk?" Hilda said.

"Did I *feel* funky?"

"Yes. Did you feel it?"

"Oh Lord, yes, half the time. All the time if I'd thought of it. But you don't think."

And Cecily and Hilda said how that was real courage, to stick it when you were in a funk, and Kit said, "I don't know about the courage. You've so jolly well got to stick it that there isn't any merit in it at all. Tell us what the cat's been doing."

The cat was brought in and worshipped.

And in a few days Kit and Morry were gone.

VIII

AND nineteen fifteen and nineteen sixteen passed. And in the spring of nineteen seventeen Christopher came home wounded. A piece of shell had ripped up his left forearm, shattering the bone.

Hilda and Cecily went up to London so that they might see him in his hospital.

Christopher was lying in his cot with his arm bandaged and slung. The wound, he said, was healing ; only splinters of bone kept on coming out of it still. Hilda wanted to know how it happened.

" We were storming a German trench when I got it."

" Was the trench taken ? " said Cecily.

" I'm afraid not. We're having the hell of a time out there. The beastliest of the whole War."

"Darling, does it hurt frightfully?" said Hilda.

"Not much. The worst time was in the base hospital when they were fishing for splinters of bone. There weren't any anæsthetics."

"Oh, you poor darling."

"Well, it's jolly lucky I didn't have my arm off. One touch of blood-poisoning and it would have been off in a jiffy. In fact, it's a jolly good thing I got wounded, otherwise I couldn't have come home. There hasn't been any leave for ages. I wish poor old Maurice could get a blighty wound."

"You don't know where he is?" said Cecily.

"Oh Lord, no. In France somewhere. Wherever he is he'll keep his end up."

"When your arm's well will they send you out again?"

"Perhaps."

"Let's hope it won't be well for a long time."

"They might give me a cushy job, so that I wouldn't have to go out again."

"Oh, if they only would——"

“ You’d better not count on it.”

The next day that Hilda and Cecily came Christopher was sitting up in his chair, and in three weeks’ time he was well enough to go down to Far End.

He came home on a perfect, warm day in spring, and as he sank back in a chair by the pear tree on the lawn under the terraces, he said, “ This is heaven.”

And then : “ To think of Far End when you’re out there is hell. Burning hell. I kept on seeing you and Cecily in the garden, walking about and picking flowers, till I couldn’t bear it. The thought of all the flowers—— Once when I was going over a battle-field I saw a flower, a little blue flower—the one I sent you—growing beside a piece of shell. It nearly broke my heart.”

“ I’ve got that flower now. It broke *my* heart when it came.”

“ And now in this garden it’s the peace of God, Hilda. The peace of God.”

IX

ONE morning Cecily came down, smiling. She was happy.

"Darlings," she said, "I've had a heavenly dream. Morry came to me and he was laughing. He said he was safe and I wasn't to be frightened, because he always would be safe."

"What a nice dream," said Hilda. "I wish I dreamed that sort of thing about Kit."

Two days later news came that Captain Maurice Calverley was reported missing.

They sat silent while realisation, overwhelming, dismaying, went over them.

Then Cecily whispered. "Oh, Kit, what do you suppose it means?"

Christopher answered slowly. "I think it *may* mean that he's taken prisoner."

"Then he would be safe, wouldn't he? Safe till the end of the war?"

"Well, it would be pretty beastly for him, but he'd be safe enough."

"Not if they put him in one of those awful camps," said Hilda.

"Morry would survive any camp," said Christopher.

"Not the ones where they have typhoid fever."

"Oh, they do things better than that, now. You bet wherever Morry is he's laughing. Most likely he's taken prisoner. It generally means that when they're missing. The killed are reported straight away. We may hear in a few days."

But the days passed on and they didn't hear. Morry was just—missing. They didn't know what had happened to him, they might never know. They evaded this issue. They clung to the hope that he had been taken prisoner. Then he lived ; he lived ; he would come back to them at the end of the war. And the war

wouldn't last for ever ; it couldn't last, people were saying, very much longer now. In a short time Morry might come back to them.

Meanwhile they knew nothing. Christopher went up to London. "I may get something out of headquarters," he said.

He went and came back the same day. He arrived at the station worn and tired, and they forbore to question him till he had got to Far End. They went up into the study.

"Well," said Cecily, "did you hear anything ?"

"Not much. They know what action he was in. We retreated and lots of fellows were made prisoner. They think he must have been among them."

"I think he was," said Cecily, and went out of the room.

"Kit," said Hilda, "I think he wasn't. I think he was killed. Morry wasn't the sort of man to let himself be taken prisoner."

"That's rot. All sorts of men are taken prisoner. There was a retreat and Morry

would be at the end of it, the last to turn tail, so the Germans got him."

"I don't believe it. I know he was killed Morry said something would happen some day—don't you remember? And it's happened to him."

"Well, don't let Cecily know you think that."

"I won't. Cecily thinks he's taken prisoner because of her dream. I don't believe in dreams. But I do believe in premonitions, and Morry knew."

"Well, if he is a prisoner we shall hear from him some day."

But that was not what they heard.

X

BUT though Cecily kept on saying he was safe, she went about with a white face and eyes that were afraid. She was always tired now, and she panted when she went upstairs or sprang up suddenly from her chair. She walked with slow, tired feet, dragging herself into the dining-room and forcing herself to her work of making endless swabs and bandages.

Hilda was frightened.

"Oh, do give it up, Cecily," she said. "You can hardly hold yourself together."

"I'm all right. It's quite easy. I could do it in my sleep. It's only my arms that are tired."

"You're not fit to do anything. You ought to go and lie down."

"I should be miserable if I did. The worst time's when I'm lying in bed, thinking. Hilda, if I only knew where Morry was."

"I know. I know. Really, I'd almost rather hear that he was killed outright than have this awful uncertainty."

"I wouldn't. I don't believe he's killed. Nothing will make me believe it. He's safe, somewhere. He *said* he was safe. I don't believe dreams come to you for nothing. You don't think he's killed, do you?"

Hilda lied. "No. I think he's taken prisoner."

"We shall hear from him then. It's months and months before they can get a letter through, but we shall hear. And when we hear we'll be able to send him food and things. People do."

"Yes, darling, we'll send him things."

"Nice things."

"He'll only give them away to the other prisoners."

"I'll tell him not to. It's a good thing it's warm weather. He won't be cold."

"No, he won't be cold," said Hilda, stifling a sob.

"I shall send him some pyjamas. It's awful to think that perhaps he hasn't got any."

It comforted Cecily to think of the things she was going to send to Morry.

And the day wore on, one of those days that grief makes interminable. They were sitting in the drawing-room in the early evening. Rain was falling, it had driven them indoors. Their talk drifted uncertainly and ceased. The room and the garden outside it were still but for the sound of the rain on the flagged path and the panes. They had come to the end of speech. Yet each thought: "What shall I say now?"

Suddenly Cecily sprang up, her face shining between the bright bosses of her hair.

"Oh, I heard Morry calling me. He's out there. I must go to him."

She ran out of the room.

Christopher and Hilda looked at each other. They stood listening for the second of time that Cecily took to cross the floor outside. Then they

heard the noise of a sudden fall. Christopher rushed into the hall, and Hilda followed him. The front door stood wide open.

They found a white heap flung across the threshold where Cecily had fallen dead. She lay on her side, with her arms stretched out in front of her, as if she had held them so for an embrace before she fell. The rain beat on her head, and one golden boss was crushed flat against the wet stone.

The next morning they heard that Captain Maurice Calverley, by an error reported missing, was now reported killed. Killed in the action where so many had been taken prisoner. Killed on the night when Cecily had dreamed her dream.

XI

CECILY'S death was not over and done with. For Hilda and Christopher it happened over and over again in an endless reiteration. Their sorrow was always with them. The shock went on renewing itself in memory. They heard again the noise of her fall, they rushed out of the room, they saw her lying across the threshold of the house, with her head on the wet stone.

She was dead and yet not dead. The house was full of the illusion of her presence. She sat with them in the quiet places, they heard her voice speaking, they heard her footstep on the stairs, she rose and went before them from room to room. The garden brought her back to them as she used to walk up and down its paths, gathering her flowers. The steep field

echoed her laughter as she played with Maurice there. And always as they went in and out of the house Cecily's dead body lay across the threshold. They had to pass it.

They were sitting together in the study, tired with their grief, in a long silence that Hilda broke.

"Kit, do you think that Morry really came, that he really called Cecily?"

"I don't know. I *don't* know." His voice was that of a man for whom thought is a burden too heavy to be borne.

"I think he did. She was so sure. Do you remember what she said? 'Oh, I heard Morry calling me. He's out there. I must go to him.' He *was* there. He *was* there. Kit—we ought to be glad that she's with him. They're happy. We oughtn't to want her back."

"I know. But I want them both back. I know nothing about their happiness. Wherever they are, if they are anywhere, it's different. It's inconceivable. I want them here, with their bodies, and their clothes, as they were.

It's no good telling me they're happy in some unknown place where I can't get at them."

"No. It's no good to *us*. But to them, Kit, it's beautiful. I'm sure it's beautiful. Cecily was happy when she rushed out to him. Don't you remember how her eyes shone?—Kit, Morry knew. It was Cecily's death he meant that time, not his own. . . . The worst of it is I can't bear the house now. All the happiness is gone out of it. It isn't a kind house any more. Only the beauty's left, and the beauty makes me miserable. It brings Cecily back and back, and I can't stand the pain of it. And always when we go in and out I see her lying there. How are we to stand it? How are we to go on living here?"

"We needn't go on. Not if you can't stand it."

"Do you mean you'd leave it?"

"Why not? I hate it too."

"It's queer, when we loved it so. I can hardly remember how we loved it. It seems so long, so long ago. But it *was* a happy house."

"It isn't now."

"No. It never will be again. Never again. Oh, why did it ever happen, when we were so happy? It's this damned War."

"The War had to happen. There's no good going back on it, Hilda. It's no worse for us than it is for thousands of people."

"That doesn't make it any better. It's no consolation to know that thousands of people are as unhappy as we are."

"No, perhaps it isn't. Don't let's talk about the War."

"I won't. Supposing we left, where should we go to?"

"Well—you'd hate London——"

"No, I shouldn't. Not if you liked it."

"I don't like or dislike it. If I get that job I want it'll mean going to London in any case. Only if we give up Far End I should let it on a long lease, that's all."

"Yes. We'll let it and go to London, whether you get your job or not."

" If I don't get it, they may send me out again when my arm's all right."

" Oh, don't. Don't let's think of that."

" No, let's think that I'll get a job."

" I wonder when——"

" When ? "

" When you'll be able to do your own work again."

" Oh, my work. Time enough to talk about that when the War's over. I can't write while it's on."

" Do you ever have ideas for the novels you can't write ? "

" No. Never. I don't think about it. That's all gone."

" It'll come back again. It'll come back."

" Perhaps."

" And perhaps, in London, some day, we shall be happy again."

" You're sure you won't hate it ? "

" No, I hate nothing but staying on here. And I hate myself for hating it. It's like killing something that you love."

“ You do love Far End, still ? ”

“ Yes, I love it. And I hate it, too. It tears me to pieces. It’ll haunt me when we’re gone. But I can’t live in it.”

He sighed and stretched himself.

“ No more can I.”

XII

THE Vivarts left Far End in the summer of nineteen seventeen. Christopher had got the job he wanted in the Intelligence Department of the War Office, so that with all their hatred of London they were obliged to live there. They said they didn't mind. Now that Cecily and Maurice were dead all places except Far End were alike to them.

In an evening of July Hilda and Christopher passed for the last time over the dreadful threshold of their house. They were going to the Manor to sleep on their last night in Eastcote. They locked the front door ; the iron gate fell to with a clang ; in the road they turned and looked back. Behind its low wall the house stood under its tall elm, empty, in sadness and

in beauty. Its naked black windows stared at them in reproach. It was as if it said : " How can you bear to leave me ? No other house will ever be to you what I have been." It warned them : " You are going away and you will long to come back again and you will not be able to come. I shall haunt you all your days and nights. You will always see me standing here in sadness and in beauty. My beauty is my own beauty, but my sadness is your sadness which you have given me. I shall never be the same again. You will never think of me without sadness."

" Kit, it's cruel of us to leave it. I feel as if it was a living thing that we could hurt. No one will ever love it as we loved it."

" Nor hate it as we hate it."

" No."

They left the keys at the gardener's cottage, their last surrender of the adored, detested house. Then they went on slowly towards the manor.

They had taken a house in Hampstead, a

white, southward looking house in Downshire Hill, charming, without memory. For the lawns and terraces of Far End they had nothing but a narrow green plot in front and a small green garden at the back. The garden had a pear tree that reminded them of Far End.

The rooms of the house were long and narrow.

Here one evening they were sitting in Christopher's study that looked out on the dark green garden. They were talking of the future, the strange, unknown future when their child would be with them.

"The awful thing, Kit, is that I don't really want him. I wish he wasn't coming."

"You'll like him when he comes."

"I'm afraid I shan't. Not as I ought to like him."

"You don't know. You don't know what it'll be like."

"I know it won't be like what it has been. And I don't want it to be different. We've been so happy. In spite of everything we're happy with each other. I don't want anybody

else but you. And I think you don't want anybody else but me. Do you?"

"No. I can't say I do. Still it's pretty rough luck on the poor little beggar if we both don't want him."

"I only don't want him because he'll come between us. It'll be somebody else to think about that isn't you."

"He won't come between us. Why, he won't be up before I've gone to the office and he'll be in bed by the time I get back."

"Yes, but Saturdays and Sundays he'll be there. Spoiling everything, interrupting everything, coming between. And you'll love him better than you do me."

"I swear I won't. I don't particularly want him either. But, I say, we must be decent to him when he comes. We mustn't let him know he isn't wanted."

"Oh, I won't let him know. We'll give him a jolly life. He shall be as happy as you were when you were a kid. I couldn't not be good to him. That's what bothers me—all the time and

thought that he'll take up. And as he gets older he'll come between us all the more. He'll be hanging about all the time when we want to be by ourselves. He'll get up earlier and go to bed later."

"You won't mind. You'll like him too much to mind what he does."

"I don't want to like him. I want to like only you."

"You *will* like him, though. You'll be awfully happy with him."

"What do you think he'll be when he grows up? What do you think you'll put him into?"

"I shan't *put* him into anything. He shall be what he wants to be."

"What would you like for him?"

"The law, perhaps, or the Army."

"Oh, *not* the Army. We've had enough of that. I won't have him taken from me and killed. Remember, he's my baby as much as he is yours."

"Oh, you *do* like him."

"Perhaps I do. But I'll never, never like him better than you."

"Are you afraid?"

"No. I'm not. I just know I couldn't."

And then: "You haven't seen what I've been making for him."

She went out of the room and came back with a pile of small garments on her arm.

"See, these are his little vests."

"Absurd," said Christopher. "Could anything be so small?"

"And these are his socks. Only he'll kick them off. He won't wear them."

"Why make them, then?"

"Oh, one does."

"Ridiculous," said Christopher. She rubbed one of the socks, gently, against his cheek.

"Do you know," she said, "I feel as if I liked him when I look at his things. So small, so absurdly small."

"Of course you like him," said Christopher. "You'll like him better than me."

"Never. If he thinks that he's making the mistake of his life."

"I don't see," said Christopher, "why we shouldn't get on awfully well together, all three."

She was silent.

"I say," he said, "you're not afraid of the time when he comes?"

"Oh, that. Not a bit."

"I am."

"You needn't be. I shall get through all right."

"Darling, it'll be awful."

"I know, but I don't care. It's only the price I pay."

"For him?"

"For you."

And they fell again into the long silence that had come before their talk. Hilda was thinking: "He doesn't want him, really, any more than I do. He only wants me."

And she was glad.

They were both glad in that moment of time.

But there were other moments when the memory of Cecily tore at their hearts with pain, when they thought again of her dead body flung across the threshold, and when they saw Far End standing far from them, in sadness and in beauty, under its tall elm.

XIII

HILDA'S little girl was born in April of nineteen eighteen. Hilda was very ill. Her athletic youth made for a difficult maternity. For forty-eight hours the child struggled to be born, and Hilda was so exhausted that they thought she must die.

Christopher stood by her bed where she lay with her head tilted back on her pillow ; her face was chalk white and worn, with dry lips parted and strained. She did not stir at his approach. He stood a long time looking down at her, his heart beating thickly with pain. When the nurse brought the child to him he turned suddenly away and would not look at it.

" Oh, sir," said the nurse, " it's such a dear little girl."

"Take it away," said Christopher.

He would hate it if it killed Hilda. He hated himself. He—he—was the cause of her abominable suffering. If it hadn't been for *him*—— If she died it would be he who had killed her.

But Hilda did not die. Slowly, very slowly, she came back to life. She lay now with her baby tucked into the crook of her arm, her white face touching its dark hair.

"It's funny," she said, "I never thought it would be a girl."

"What rum eyes it's got," said Christopher. "Like little pig's eyes."

"Pig's eyes are pretty, so quick and bright."

"It's just like a little sucking pig."

"I don't care if it is, but it isn't," said Hilda.

"It's mummy's own ducky one."

"I told you you'd like it when it came."

"I love her. Oh, Kit, don't you love her too?"

"No," said Kit, "I don't. Not a bit."

" Oh, but you must, you will. She's just as much yours as mine. You *shall* love her."

" If she'd killed you I should have hated her."

" Oh no, Kit, you couldn't hate her. She's so small and so very, very weak. I'm glad I didn't die. It's awful to think that if I'd died you'd have hated the poor mite. Can't you love her now I haven't died ? "

" I'll try."

" Kit, do you remember how I said I didn't want her ? "

" Yes."

" I was a beast. But I didn't know. I didn't know. I didn't think it would be like this."

She lay a long time, thinking, while he looked at her. Already it was as if something of Hilda had gone from him to their child.

" We shan't have to bother about what she'll be," she said. " She shall marry and have children, little babies as ducky as herself."

" You don't know. She may grow up very ugly."

" She couldn't, Kit. It's not as if you were

ugly. Or me. I think she's prettier to-day than she was yesterday. If she keeps it up."

And the baby did keep it up. She grew prettier and prettier and more entrancing, till even Christopher owned that she was rather nice. Her career was marked by tremendous events : her first smile, her first baby chuckle ; her first laugh ; the day she swam like a frog over the rug ; the day she crawled ; the day she stood alone, the day of her first walking, her first talking. She grew up strong and healthy.

They had called her Jane.

XIV

CHRISTOPHER's work in the Intelligence Department was done. It was the autumn of nineteen nineteen. In that year Christopher was working on his novel "Peter Harden." Once free from his office work he wrote all morning and in the late afternoon from five to seven. After lunch he would go for a drive in the car with Hilda, or for a walk on the Heath, when they talked over what he was doing ; in the evenings he read to her what he had written.

One evening Grevill Burton, the critic of *The Museion* and *The New Monthly*, had dined with them. The three were sitting upstairs in the long, pleasant drawing-room ; they were talking about "Peter Harden."

"I'm trying," Christopher said, "to do something different this time, something that so far

as I know hasn't been done before. Not in the same way or to the same extent."

"That's interesting," said Burton.


"I'm eliminating God Almighty, the all-wise, all-seeing author."

"Eliminating yourself. How do you manage that? You tell the story. You make things happen."

"Only as they happen in Peter Harden's consciousness. I don't stand outside, I work from the inside out."

"There's nothing different in that. Other novelists have identified themselves with their characters. Every decent novelist does."

"Not as I do. They remain outside, all-wise, all-seeing. God Almighty and his creation. In my book there's nothing but Peter Harden. I am not wiser than Peter. I don't see an inch farther than he sees. Everything that is vague and uncertain in Peter's mind is vague and uncertain in the book. If Peter misunderstands the other characters they are misunderstood. I don't step in and correct



him. I don't display a superior understanding."

"Then none of the other characters," said Burton, "can be properly drawn."

"They are just as properly drawn as the characters we meet ourselves in our own lives. We have nothing to go on but our own consciousness of other people."

"I see. What the philosophers call the 'egocentric predicament.' "

"Why not? All our worlds are egocentric. You can't get beyond your own consciousness. Only it's Peter's ego and Peter's consciousness."

"But, Kit," said Hilda. "If you can't get beyond your own consciousness how do you get at Peter's? "

"By imagination. That's the **only** point where art goes one better than life."

"But Peter—he's only Peter as he appears to your imagination."

"But he appears to my imagination as he is. He's real. Because he's a self, containing his own world, he's real."

" But," said Burton, " the people in Peter's world are only people as they appear to Peter ; *they* aren't real. Whereas, if you'd set to work like any other novelist, like God Almighty, they'd be as real as Peter."

" They're just as real as people in anybody's world. In fact they should be more real than God Almighty's people because they're appearing in their natural setting of a mind. Peter's consciousness is as good as anybody else's consciousness. Of course there's no absolute certainty about them, but then there's no absolute certainty about the people that we know. Peter's not absolutely certain. And it's just this element of uncertainty that makes them real ; they are as they would be in a real natural world, a world of somebody's consciousness. Nobody interferes with Peter's reality. There's no author running about, arranging and analysing and explaining and representing. It's presentation, not representation, all the time. There's nothing but the stream of Peter's consciousness. The book is a stream of consciousness, going on

and on ; it's life itself going on and on. I don't draw Peter feeling and thinking. Peter feels and thinks and his thoughts and feelings are the actual stuff of the book. No reflected stuff. I just turn out the contents of Peter's mind."

" Without selection ? "

" No, not without selection. I admit that's where I come in. But it's only to choose which of Peter's thoughts and feelings are the most purely Peter. So you don't get mixed up with a lot of irrelevant stuff."

" But your style. You can't eliminate your style."

" No, I can't eliminate my style. But there again my style is Peter. I'm trying to make it crystal with no stain of me. It's frightfully difficult, because it's all got to be so intensely concentrated. I've got to get the very heat of consciousness into it."

" And what have you gained, you, more than God Almighty, when you've got it ? "

" Can't you see ? I gain a unity which is a unity of form, and more than a unity of form,

a unity of substance, an intense reality where no film or shadow of anything extraneous comes between. I present a world of one consciousness, undivided and undefiled, a world which is everybody's world. You can't stand outside of your own consciousness, and the nearer you get down to one consciousness the nearer you'll be to reality. That's all."

"If," said Burton, "you can do the trick."

"I believe I've done it. Haven't I, Hilda?"

"Yes, you've done it. It's the most real thing I've read in my life. It is, really, Grevill. You've no idea what he's done."

"Oh well, I can see what he's driving at."

"And you see," said Hilda, "that it's different from anything else that's been done, ever?"

"Yes, I see it's different. I own I couldn't quite see at first how it could be. It seemed to me that everything had been done already and that there wasn't any room for a new form. I wonder——"

"What?"

"Whether you could use it in another way."

Whether you couldn't manage the one consciousness business for every character in a novel, so that each should have its first-hand reality. Is that possible?"

"It's possible, at a sacrifice of unity, but it would be jolly difficult. The consciousnesses would have to be adjusted, and they'd have to interpenetrate, to be as they are in themselves *and* as they appear to each other. Concentration and unity to the extent I've got them would have to go. But it would be an interesting experiment."

"Your experiment's interesting enough. If it comes off—and I can't think of you as doing anything that doesn't—if it comes off you'll found a new school. Other people will be doing it too."

"I don't want him to found a school. I don't want other people to be doing it too."

"They will. The thing's begun with Kit, but you can't expect it to end with him. You must make up your mind to that."

"I want Kit to be the only one."

"Well, he won't be. But you needn't

worry. There won't be many. The method's too difficult, too limiting and too exacting. God Almighty's way's easier."

"You do think there's something in it?" said Christopher. "I'm not rushing up a blind alley?"

"No, you're making a new high way. There's lots in it. Enough, as I say, for a new school."

"How long do you think it'll be before you've finished?" said Hilda.

"Oh, ever so long. It'll take ages."

"Don't be too long. I'm afraid of somebody getting in first."

"You're always afraid of something. Always thinking something's going to happen."

"Well, it may. I shall be miserable till the thing's safely out."

"You needn't be. Kit's got the field all to himself at present. Nobody'll get in first."

"Promise me, promise me, Grevill, you won't tell anybody."

"No, I won't tell anybody. I'll keep the great secret. I'm glad you're doing it, Kit. It'll be

something for me to write about. Something worth while."

"You haven't seen it yet."

"I can trust you. Well—I must be going. Let me know how you get on."

"I will."

When Christopher came back from the gate Hilda's eyes were shining.

"Oh, Kit, he's quite excited about it. He thinks no end of it."

"He didn't say the idea was all rot. But wait," Christopher said, "till he's seen it."

"It'll be all right. You'll see it'll be all right."

In the awful moments when Christopher's power failed him, when his idea slipped from his grasp or when no words could be found to embody it, Hilda comforted him. She always knew that the bad moment would pass, that the idea would come back, brighter and more alive than ever, and that the stream of words would flow again. In these days she lived for Christopher and Peter Harden. All morning, after the first half hour with the baby, she sat typing

and re-typing what he had written. Sometimes a whole morning's work would be wasted because of some austere revision, but Hilda copied again and again without a murmur.

"You *are* good to me," he once said.

"Oh, Kit, I love it. I like to see it coming nice and clear out of that awful jungle of the manuscript. And if I didn't do this, what should I do?"

"Play with baby."

"I can't play with baby all day long."

"It's odd how little difference she's made. She hasn't come between us."

"The little lamb."

"I told you she wouldn't."

"No. I think we're more to each other than we ~~ever~~ were."

"I know I can't do without you. Everything would go if you weren't here."

"I believe you want me more than Jenny does. You baby."

"I believe I do."

But though Jenny did not come between

them, it was not the baby but Christopher's work that drew them to each other. Mercifully, the baby was strong and healthy, a good little thing that hardly ever cried ; she had no need of any great care. She was adorable with her face of heart-rending innocence under the hood of her dark hair, hair that curled in duck's tails above the nape of her tender neck. And Hilda adored her, after Christopher. Every day, in the slack time between tea and dinner, Jenny came into the drawing-room to be played with and made much of. But, except for the rare times when he left off work between five and seven, Christopher saw very little of his daughter. Peter Harden absorbed him utterly.



XV

IN the autumn of nineteen twenty " Peter Harden " was finished, published, reviewed, acclaimed as its author's best book. The position that Christopher had now won was unassailable ; only one or two minor reviewers attacked him with such evident joy in the onslaught that they might be suspected of a certain malice ; one or two complained of " the wilful limitation of his method " ; the rest praised the new thing because of its newness. Christopher was said to have at last found himself. Everything he had done before was tentative, experimental ; this was achievement.

" Peter Harden " was dedicated

TO MY WIFE

BUT FOR WHOSE HELP

THIS BOOK

WOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN WRITTEN

It was not true, but Hilda and Christopher liked to think it was. Hilda felt that she had been made immortal.

"There I am," she said, "for ever and ever. Wherever this book goes I go. I could burst with pride."

"All my books shall be dedicated to you. Nobody else has had anything to do with them, nor ever shall have."

"Not Grevill Burton?"

"No. It isn't the same thing. He doesn't go with me through the hell it is. He doesn't bear the burden and the heat."

"I am so glad to bear it. Do you mean really you couldn't have done it without me?"

"I mean it really. For one thing I couldn't stand another typist. To have a strange young woman sitting there with her fingers in my manuscripts, to have her wretched little mind mixed up with mine, messing up all my ideas; why, I couldn't work within a mile of her."

"At least I've saved you that."

"You've saved me everything."

"I wonder how it'll be when the new baby comes."

"It won't make any difference. Jenny didn't."

"No, darling Jenny."

The new baby, their son, came in June nineteen twenty-one. He was so small and weak that they thought he wouldn't live, so small and weak that Hilda's heart went out to him in a passion of tenderness and pity. He needed constant care, and this his mother gave to him herself. He made a difference at once. He filled the house with his crying.

And then Christopher went to pieces, his nerves shattered by the long, lacerating cry. And little Jenny, once so good, irritated beyond endurance, became naughty and would join in with a scream more piercing, more malignant. Christopher couldn't work.

"I shall go mad," he said, "if I try and work through it."

It drove him from the house. He rented a

room in the High Street where he worked. Hilda was left with the crying babies.

All morning she sat in the nursery, nursing the sick baby and trying to still his cry. There was difficulty with his food, difficulty with his sleep, difficulty with every minute of his painful day. And there was always with her the fear that he would die, so hard it was to keep life in him. Christopher would come home for lunch and they would sit through it in anxiety, listening for the child's cry. When it came Hilda would start up and rush to him.

"You mustn't," Christopher would say.

"But it breaks my heart to hear him."

"You must harden your heart. He must learn. He must do without you while you eat and while you rest."

"He can't. He can't learn. He's too ill."

And so, always when the child cried Hilda rushed to him. Two years went by. The child lived. He grew stronger, but stronger only to cry. He was still very weak and sickly and had to be cared for every hour. Hilda was his

slave. All morning she was with him and in the late afternoon. The drives and the short walks with Christopher became shorter. In the evening she was tired and preoccupied and lay on the sofa, hardly listening to what Christopher said to her, waiting in misery for the child's cry.

Christopher was irritated. "How long is this going on?" he said.

"Till baby gets better and stops crying."

"Yes, but now he's asleep. You might try and listen to what I say."

"I am listening."

"You're not. You're listening for that child to begin again."

"Well, every minute I think he'll begin."


"So that we can't have peace even when he's not crying."

"It looks like it. What were you saying about that last chapter?"

"Oh, never mind. You're not interested."

"Oh, Kit, I am. You know I am."

"You're not. You're interested in nothing but that wretched kid."



"Oh no, he doesn't interest me. He only breaks my heart. Kit—you mustn't feel unkindly towards him. He's so ill. Sometimes I think he'll never, never be well."

"Then I don't know how we're going on."

"Oh, just like this."

"And this is misery."

"It can't be helped."

"I think it could. If you didn't always rush up to him the minute he cries. He knows he can get everything he wants by yelling, so of course he yells."

"What would you do? Let him scream his heart out?"

"I'd let him alone."

"Then he *would* scream his heart out. As it is, I sometimes think it must burst with crying."

"Why can't you leave him to Nurse?"

"Because Nurse is all very well, but it isn't the same thing. It's me he wants."

"Of course it's you he wants if you've taught him to want you, and that's what you've done."

And now you're a slave to him. You might have thought of me, Hilda."

"Of you? But I do think of you. That's why I can't bear it. He *has* come between us. Nothing's been the same since he came."

"If you'd thought of me you wouldn't have let him get such a hold of you."

"What could I do? I never let Jenny come between us. But Jenny was different. You can't treat a sick child as if it was a well one."

"You needn't have let the thing grow into this insane tyranny."

"What's the good of going back on it? There it is, and it's I who pay for it."

"Oh come, I think I pay pretty considerably."

"I know, darling, and I hate your paying. If I could make it all fall on me, I would."

At that he softened. "Poor little Hilda, it's rough luck on you."

"Don't let's talk about it. Tell me about your book."

And then the child screamed.

" Ah, there he is again. I must go to him."

And she went. When she came back again she was exhausted. She lay still, with her eyes shut ; every now and then tears broke from her eyelids and fell. Christopher watched them. He was thinking : " Poor little Hilda, it's ten times worse for her than it is for me. I haven't got to nurse the little beggar." An awful thought came to him. If only he wasn't there. He didn't wish that the child would die, but he did wish he wasn't there, he wished that he had never come. His whole life had changed to a slow torment since he came. Hilda could do nothing for him any more. Every minute of her life, it seemed to him, was taken up by the child. She could think of nothing else. He talked to her and she tried to listen, but her thoughts were far away.

Worst of all, Christopher had had to engage a typist. Hilda had no longer any time to copy for him. The long hours of delightful work were gone, and the long talks were done ; mind no longer flashed to mind, beating out

the light by which he saw. As long as the child was there he would have to go alone.

He looked up. Hilda had risen. She drew her hand across her eyes.

"I'm so tired, Kit. I'm afraid I'll have to go to bed."

She was always too tired to sit up with him in the one time that the baby left them.

Christopher sat a little while by himself, thinking, thinking of the time they had had together, thinking with anguish of the silence, the beauty and the deep peace of Far End. Nothing in all his life had been more beautiful than that year they had had there, before the War, before Cecily died.

XVI

CHRISTOPHER couldn't get over the feeling that Hilda could have helped it if she had chosen, that this sacrifice of herself was not necessary. It was morbid. She had let her pity get the better of her, and pity, what was it but a form of voluptuous self-indulgence? Other women had sick children, but they didn't give themselves to be devoured by them as Hilda had given herself to be devoured by Richard. If she had had any sense of justice she would have seen that it was not right that her child should have everything and her husband nothing. She would have done something to adjust their claims. She would have given him one hour. But no ; there was an end of all that Hilda had once done for him. She was too busy with the

child in the mornings to type his manuscripts, too dull and heavy in the afternoons, too tired in the evenings to talk to him in her brilliant, exciting way. Her brain was so beaten with the sound of the child's screaming that it could no longer think. Her nerves were so exhausted that she could no longer feel her old excitement and enthusiasm. And Christopher couldn't go on being excited and enthusiastic by himself. In their ten years of marriage he had become abjectly dependent on Hilda. There had been the ghastly interruption of the War, there had been the last two years of misery, but the rest of it had been spent in an intimate spiritual communion that tied him to Hilda closer than any bond of flesh. And now he looked on in agony at the gradual loosening of the tie. The child had only to push out his weak hands and they were put asunder. And with all his love for Hilda and his pity for her, Christopher could not help feeling a dull resentment tempered by remorse.

Resentment and remorse do not make for

happiness, and Christopher was unhappy. He worked, he worked harder than ever, spending more and more time in his room outside, glad to get away from the house that was loud with the child's crying. But the spring of joy in his work was gone, and he lived in fear lest the heaviness that was in him should sink into his book and ruin it. And as Hilda was too tired to listen to him he spent more and more evenings with Grevill Burton in his rooms, reading to him what he had written, till gradually Grevill took Hilda's place. But it wasn't the same thing. Grevill might be excited and enthusiastic, but it was not Hilda's excitement and enthusiasm. Grevill's attitude was solid and masculine and trustworthy, but it lacked the passionate loving faith that Hilda had brought to him. And with Hilda removed from him, absorbed in the cares of motherhood, it was as if that passionate loving faith were gone from him for ever. He couldn't believe that under all her preoccupation it still lived. He needed a perpetual reassurance.

And through it all his heart ached for her

when he saw her lying there too tired to listen to his reading, too tired to talk to him. But resentment and jealousy, jealousy of the small dark thing that came between them, with hands that pushed them apart, with a dark head that must always lie against his mother's breast—jealousy and resentment kept him from saying the words that would have comforted her.

Sometimes she roused herself with a piteous effort.

"Kit," she said, "won't you read me what you've written? Why do you never read to me now?"

"Because you never listen."

"Baby's sleeping. I could listen to-night."

"And if baby wakes you won't listen."

"Perhaps he won't wake."

"Perhaps isn't good enough. What do you want me to read to you for?"

"Because—Oh, Kit, I'm simply longing to hear this new thing. It's a female Peter Harden, isn't it?"

"I suppose so."

“ Well—read it.”

And Christopher dragged himself up as if unwillingly and fetched his manuscript and read. And Hilda woke up and was absorbed and excited ; she said all the right things, made the right suggestions, was convinced that “ Anne Bywater : A Life ” was better even than “ Peter Harden,” a subtler, more exquisite thing. The baby never woke up and the evening passed in a long delightful talk about “ Anne Bywater.”

“ How you’ve done her,” said Hilda, “ I can’t think.”

“ She’s worse to do than Peter. You see I’m not absolutely sure of her.”

“ Nobody would know it. She’s absolutely right.”

“ Well, I’ve had a jolly evening. Hilda, why can’t we be like this every night ? You seemed as keen as ever.”

“ I am as keen as ever. There’s no reason why we shouldn’t do it again, only—it depends on baby.”

And the next night and the next and the

next were baby's bad nights. No sooner had they settled comfortably to the reading than his lamentable cry was heard. And Hilda went up to him and stayed with him until he slept again. By that time Christopher was in a thoroughly bad temper and wouldn't read any more.

And the next night, also, he refused to read.

"It's no good," he said. "He'll only cry. And if he doesn't cry I'll think he's going to. . . . No, we've just got to make up our minds that things can't be the same again. That wretched kid has dished us."

"Don't call him a wretched kid."

"Well, he is, and he makes everybody wretched around him."

"Poor lamb, as if he could help it."

"If he could help it there'd be some hope. I suppose it's our own fault for having him."

"It isn't his fault."

"But how is he to grow up? Will he go on like this for ever?"

"Of course not. He'll grow out of it. It's only while he's a baby."

"He'll be a baby for ages yet. We've got to look forward to three, four or five years of it."

"Three years most likely. They'll pass."

"They'll pass. But how?"

"Well, you'll only make it worse by grouching about it. After all, Kit, if I can bear it, surely you can. You've got your room out and your work and all sort of things to take your mind off it. I should say you'd got everything you want."

"I haven't. I want you. I want you back again as you were at the beginning."

"Oh, my dear, I'm the same, just the same as I was in the beginning."

"You're not. You're always tired. You're always wrapped up in that baby. I don't come in anywhere."

"You come in everywhere. I love you even now ten times more than I love baby. And God knows I love *him*."

"Even now?"

" Yes, even now when you're as cross and disagreeable as you can be."

" I didn't know I was such a brute. Tell me, am I growing a brute? Is that what it's doing to me? "

" You're a dear. A cross, disagreeable dear, and I love you. What you say doesn't make any difference."

" Yes, but it's pretty awful if I've got into a habit of saying beastly things. I suppose it's that kid gets on my nerves."

" He gets on mine."

" Yes, but you women are different. You've an infinite patience. You're simply wonderful. How you can go on day after day, and night after night with a thing that does nothing but scream—that doesn't even love you, that hasn't the sense to love you—— "

" He does love me. You know nothing about it."

" I suppose you mean he doesn't love me."

" Well, he would if you took more notice of him."

"Take notice? I should think I took notice enough. You can't not take notice of a child that howls from morning to night."

"If you played with him and petted him."

"How can I play with him and pet him when he yells my head off? If he'd let up for a single minute I might——"

"Never mind, you'll like him some day when he's left off yelling."

"Shall I? I only know we were happy before he came and we haven't been happy since."

"Oh. Kit, how happy we were at Far End. Do you remember?"

"Yes, I remember."

"But I couldn't go back there. We shall never go back there. All that's ended. And when I think of it it tears my heart."

"Don't think of it."

"I can't help thinking of it. Every day I see the house standing there, with the flowers looking over the wall, and the elm tree and the pear trees in the garden, and all the lovely rooms. And I can't bear it."

" But you don't mind this place, do you? "

" No, I don't *mind* it. We must live somewhere, it's as good as any other place that isn't Far End. Sometimes I wonder whether Richard wouldn't have been different if we'd lived at Eastcote."

" Oh no, he'd have howled the place down the same as he does here. It's in his nerves."

" Only *we* might have been different. In that peace."

" There wouldn't have been any peace with Richard there. And there wasn't any peace before we left it. Have you forgotten why we left it? "

" No. I haven't forgotten. Only now we're away it's the peace that I remember most. If ever a place had a soul, Far End was that place."

" Well, we must make the best of what we've got. After all, you're here. There are moments when I can talk to you."

" No, but it's awful not being able to work for you. That's what I can't bear. I loved working for you."

" I know you did. I hate going on without you."

" How does the new typist do ? "

Christopher had dismissed two typists, both elderly, and had acquired a third.

" Damnably. No, that isn't true. She does very well."

" She's very pretty."

" Is she ? I hadn't noticed. All I want is that she should do her work well."

Hilda was silent. She couldn't bear to think of the new typist sitting in Christopher's study, working for Christopher.

XVII

MONA RYLAND sat in Christopher's study typing "Anne Bywater." The house was still, for a wonder ; an hour had passed since Richard's last wild scream ; nothing was heard but the steady tack, tack of the keys and the click of the shifting cylinder.

Every now and then Mona glanced at the clock and typed faster. Her speed was wonderful. As the clock struck half past six she rose and went to the chimney-piece and looked at herself in the glass. She took a little comb out of her pocket and combed out her thick bobbed hair ; it shone, deep copper and red gold. She turned and twisted it to get an all round view of herself and smiled at the face in the glass that smiled back at her. She was pleased with the face in the glass.

Then she stood still and listened. She slid back to her place at the writing-table and began typing faster and faster.

The door opened and Christopher came in.

" Good evening, Miss Ryland."

" Good evening, Mr. Vivart."

" Still busy ? "

" Yes. I haven't quite finished. I didn't expect you back till seven."

Christopher hardly ever came back till seven, but sometimes he would appear soon after half-past six. And regularly at six o'clock Mona Ryland went to the looking-glass and combed out her hair.

" I finished sooner than I thought I should. There's another chapter for you."

" Good. Oh, Mr. Vivart, I do think this is a beautiful book."

" Do you ? "


" Yes, I do. I know my opinion isn't worth anything and it's cheek of me to say so——"

" I'm very glad you like it," said Christopher, gravely.

Then he looked at Miss Ryland and saw that she was very pretty. He had noticed it before but had thought well to pretend to Hilda that he hadn't. Hilda should at least have the satisfaction of knowing that no woman existed for him but her. And now he noticed all over again that Miss Ryland was very pretty. He noticed the thick masses of her hair, deep copper and red gold, curling deliciously into the nape of her privet-white neck. He noticed the perfect heart-shaped face and that faint greenish tinge in its white that red haired women sometimes have ; he noticed her blue eyes darkened with black lashes under fine black eyebrows, and her delicate nose, too straight to be altogether aquiline, too aquiline to be altogether straight, and her small, heart-shaped mouth, perfect and pure, set in the privet-white oval of her face. There was a faint flush in her cheeks as she looked up at him. And he thought with a slight surprise : " Why, she's beautiful."

" Have you typed chapter seven ? " he said.

" Yes, I've begun eight."



“ Well, I must write seven over again.”

“ Oh, that lovely chapter. Must it be altered ? ”

“ Yes, it must. I’m sorry that your beautiful typing has to go into the waste-paper basket.”

“ Oh ” (Miss Ryland had a habit of saying “ Oh ”), “ that doesn’t matter. I’d copy it out a hundred times with pleasure.”

“ You know,” he said, “ your work is beautiful. You should have seen my last typist. Sentences punctuated with k-k-l, k-k-l, qryzcwklickl per cent.”

“ Well, anyhow I don’t do that.”

“ You are a perfect typist.”

Miss Ryland knew she was a perfect typist ; her letters were clear-cut and clean, never a mistake, never an erasure ; with an infinite patience she was willing to copy over and over again. A better typist even than Hilda.

“ It is good of you to let me work here, Mr. Vivart. My place at home is so tiny I haven’t room to turn round.”

“ You see, I have you under my eyes here.

I hope the baby's crying doesn't disturb you."

"He hasn't cried for quite an hour. But I can't think how you can bear it."

"I don't bear it. I've run away."

"Is that it? I wondered why you'd left your beautiful room here."

"That's why. Well, I mustn't keep you. You must be longing to get off."

"Oh no, I'm never longing to get off. I hate going back."

"Are you so fond of your work then?"

"Yes."

She looked at him, a straight full look of her dark blue eyes, lapis lazuli, under crystal and a shadow.

"You have something for me to do?"

"No, only a few letters to dictate. They'll keep till to-morrow."

"Oh no, I'll do them now. I can post them on my way home."

"Are you sure you don't mind?"

"Quite sure."



And Christopher sat on the chair facing Miss Ryland and dictated, and Miss Ryland took the letters down in shorthand. And as he dictated, slowly, he was aware of her face tilted up at him between the sentences, and of her eyes, dark blue and earnest, fixed on him, waiting for the next word.

At last it was all over. Miss Ryland got up to go, putting on an enchanting little hat that fitted close to her head ; delicious little thick curls came out under the brim.

And Christopher looked at her again.

“ What will you do when you get home ? ”
He really wanted to know.

“ I shall read. Read all evening.”

“ What books have you got ? ”

She smiled at him adorably.

“ I’ve got ‘ The Transgressor,’ and ‘ The Idealist ’ and ‘ Peter Harden.’ ”

“ Nearly all me.”

“ I’m going to get everything you’ve ever written. The reading room’s got them all. When I work for an author I like to soak myself

in him. You can't know too much about an author."

"I wonder how many typists trouble to do that."

"It isn't a trouble when it's you. Oh, Mr. Vivart, I adore your books."

"Even 'The Idealist'?"

"Why not? Shan't I understand it? Is it a very difficult one?"

"It is a little difficult. But you'll understand it all right. I think you'd understand anything you gave your mind to."

"Oh, Mr. Vivart, do you really think so?"

"Yes. That's how you strike me."

"You may be sure," she said, "I'll give my mind."

And it was as if she had said, "I'll give all there is of me."

She was going. He went to the door and called after her.

"Miss Ryland, by the way, if you work here in the morning you must stay to lunch."

“ Must I ? That is good of you. Shan’t I be frightfully in the way ? ”

“ Not a bit. It’s much the best arrangement.”

He knew it was the best arrangement for Miss Ryland, who was poor. He had an idea that she spent more on her clothes than on her food.

He thought : “ Poor little thing. That’ll be one square meal in the day for her, anyway.” And then : “ I hope Hilda won’t mind.”

If Hilda minded she never let him know.

XVIII

" Krr," said Hilda, two months later, " Mona's a very engaging little girl."

" Isn't she? Isn't she? And you should see her type. She's a oner. She does the work of ten typists in the time of half one. I never saw such a speed."

" Then why does she always have to stay on into the afternoon? "

Christopher considered it. " Lunch, I suppose, poor little devil. It's important."

" I never thought of that."

" I'm afraid," said Christopher, " she overworks and under-feeds. When she's done with me she's got some other fellow's manuscripts. Yet she's always fresh. She's as keen at the end of the day as she is at the beginning."

"I wonder," said Hilda, "if she's as keen about the other fellow's work."

"Oh, I expect she is. It's conscience."

"Conscience?"

"Yes, why shouldn't it be?"

"I don't know. Only I believe she isn't always working on your stuff when she's here."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean she brings other people's stuff in and does it here."

"Oh, that's all right. I told her she might when she was through with me."

"Oh, Kit, what did you do that for?"

"Because—oh hang it all, it's a big bright room and there's a good fire. She can breathe and keep warm. You should see the hole she lives in."

"Have you seen it?"

"Yes. I had to go there with a message. I found her living in a den about four feet by eight, with a small black fire and the window shut because it was too cold to open it. If you lived like that you'd be glad to get out of it

into a decent room. At least I know she's comfortable for nine hours out of the twenty-four. Her Sundays must be awful."

"My dear, you'd better ask her to live here altogether."

"Don't be silly. Come, Hilda, you'd have done it yourself."

"Bless you, you don't suppose I mind, do you? It's not as if I could sit in the study myself, or you either."

"No, it isn't, is it?"

So Mona stayed on in Christopher's study. She stayed for lunch and for tea, and sometimes after tea she took half an hour off and played with little Jenny.

And once on a warm clear day in December Christopher came to Hilda and said, "It's a ripping day. Supposing we took Mona for a drive?"

"Can she spare the time?"

"Of course she can spare it. She's frightfully off colour. A run will do her good."

"Oh, all right, if you want to," said Hilda.

So Mona, wrapped in Christopher's British warm, was taken for a drive into the country. Hilda sat in front with Christopher and Mona by herself behind. The drive was punctuated by cries of ecstasy from Mona, at a dog in the road, at a baby, at the Scotch firs on the Heath, at the sight of green fields. Even Christopher and Hilda were touched by Mona's joy.

They had tea at an inn, and Mona's cries broke out again. "This is the most delicious bread and butter. And topping jam. You don't mind my eating an awful lot? I'm *so* hungry. I know I'm making a perfect pig of myself." And when it was all over, "Oh, Mr. Vivart, I've enjoyed it so. I haven't been so happy for ages."

"That's right," said Christopher; "we'll do it again some day."

And they did it again and again. Mona's face began to have a bright colour; she was more beautiful than ever.

One day when they were getting ready for a drive, the baby's sad cry was heard.

" I can't go," Hilda said.

Christopher followed her up the stairs.

" You must go," he said.

" I can't. And Mona can't go."

" Why not ? "

" You can't take her by yourself, it wouldn't do."

" I don't see why not."

" Well, it just wouldn't."

" But I can't disappoint the poor kid. It would be cruel."

" Oh well, have it your own way."

And Christopher had it his own way. Little Mona, wrapped in his British warm, sat beside him.

For a long time she was silent in a happiness too great for words. Then their speed increased, and as they shot into the open country Mona gave tongue.

" Oh, Mr. Vivart, this is heavenly. How I wish it would last for ever."

" For ever ? "

" Yes, to go on and on, faster and faster, and

never come back again, that would be heaven."

"You'd get pretty sick of it after the first two days."

"I shouldn't. It's awful to think that in another two hours it'll be all over. But it *will* last two hours, won't it?"

"It'll last four if you like. We needn't be back till half-past seven."

"Needn't we?"

"No, and you'll stay and dine and I'll drive you home afterwards."

"Oh, that *will* be nice."

She drew a deep breath of delight. The wind of their speed whipped red into her cheeks and little stray curls blew out round the rim of her hat. Sitting there, tucked beside him, she was a little vivid figure of incarnate joy.

He smiled at her, and her joy entered into him.

"I say, we *are* having a ripping time, aren't we?"

"We are. I won't think of it being over. There's lots more of it left."

"Lots. We haven't had tea yet."

In an inn at St. Albans they had tea. Mona poured it out, blushing with pleasure as she asked him whether he took milk and sugar. She had pretty privet-white hands that made a light play with cups and saucers. Every gesture was pretty. Christopher considered her.

"Tell me something about yourself," he said. "You've been working for me all these months and I know no more about you than when you came."

"Oh well, you know of course, that I haven't got anybody."

"Got anybody?"

"Anybody belonging to me."

"That's sad, isn't it?"

"Yes, it's very sad. You see, mother died two years ago, and father died a long while before that, and there's nobody but me. It's pretty awful living all alone."

"Poor child, it must be. But you've friends, haven't you?"

" One or two. There's Sally, she's my great friend. And Amy."

" Nobody besides Sally and Amy ? "

" Nobody that matters. There's Billy, but he doesn't count."

" Oh, Billy doesn't count, doesn't he ? Why not ? "

" You haven't seen his nose."

" A nose that's a bar to perfect intimacy, it must be frightful."

" It is. But poor Billy can't help his nose. He's rather a dear, or would be, if only——"

" If only what ? "

" Oh, I don't think I ought to tell you. It'll sound so funny."

" Do tell me."

" You won't tell anybody else ? "

" Rather not. I'm the soul of honour."

" I'm sure you're the soul of honour. If only Billy would leave me alone."

" Billy makes love to you, does he ? "

" I suppose you'd call it making love. He says a lot of silly things."

" And of course poor Billy isn't in the running, with that nose. Do you know, I think I'm sorry for Billy. It must be awful to be in love with you."

" How can you tell ? "

" You mean, if I'm not ? "

" Of course you're not."

" Of course. But if I were Billy I should find it awful. Are you very unkind to him ? "

" It's no good being kind. It only makes him think things."

" I suppose it does. How are you going to get rid of Billy ? "

" That's it, I can't get rid of him. He sticks."

" Is Billy the only one, Mona ? "

" Well no, there's Dicky."

" Does Dicky—count ? "

" No. No more than Billy."

" Has he, too, got a nose ? "

" Oh no, but he hasn't got any money. And if he had I wouldn't have him."

" Why not ? "

" Because I don't care for him."

" Poor Dicky. Anybody else ? "

" No. None like that."

" None like that."

" So you see I haven't many friends."

" And you're lonely ? "

" Well, I'm not so lonely now as I used to be."

" Why not now ? " He knew why.

" Because of you. And Mrs. Vivart."

" I'm glad if we've made you not feel lonely."

" Oh, you can't think how happy you've made me."

" I'm so glad."

" Nobody was ever so good to me as you are. I can't think why."

" You don't think you've got anything to do with it ? "

" Me ! Why, of course not. How could I ? "

" You don't know then, Mona, that you're very nice ? "

"I! Am I? *Am* I nice? Really and truly?"

"Really and truly."

He thought: "Why am I saying these things to her? Damned fool."

"Has nobody ever told you that before?"

"Only Billy and Dicky. It's different when you say it."

"How when I say it?"

"Because then I feel it really might be so. Billy and Dicky wouldn't know what was nice, really; but you'd know."

"Yes, I think I know."

He thought: "It's time to stop this idiocy."

"Well, it's getting late. We'd better be going."

↳ Mona wrung her hands. "Oh, oh, it's half all over."

"Only half. We'll have a look at the cathedral first."

They went and looked at the cathedral. Then Christopher tucked her up in the car and they drove home. They were both silent. Christopher

because he repented of his speech, and Mona because she nursed in secret a happiness that was half retrospect.

"Bless me, how late you are," said Hilda, when they had returned. "Did you have a good time, child?"

"Heavenly."

"I mustn't do that again," thought Christopher.

"Kit," said Hilda as they sat together after Christopher had driven Mona home, "that child's getting fond of you."

"Rot."

"It isn't. She hasn't eyes except for you. Such eyes too."

"They are rather stunning."

"Are you being careful?"

"If you mean, have I made love to her? I haven't."

"I didn't mean that. I mean you mustn't be too kind."

"The poor kid hasn't had much kindness up till now."

"She mustn't look to you for it, then."

"But if I'm not kind to her, what can I be?"

"Well—cool, dear."

"But I am cool. Good God, you talk as if I were in love with her."

"Be cool in your manner to her is what I mean."

"Be cool and snub her when she's happy and make her miserable. I simply can't."

"Then there'll be trouble."

"There won't be. The kid isn't a fool."

"I'm not so sure. And if there's trouble, Kit, she'll have to go."

"Go? The best typist I ever had."

Hilda took the blow bravely. "I'm thinking of her," she said. "And you should think of her."

"I do think of her. I swear to you I haven't done a thing, I haven't said a word that would make her think——"

"It's not what she thinks, my dear, it's what she feels."

" Well then, to make her feel——"

" Of course you haven't. Only don't be kinder than you are now."

" No, I won't be kinder. But really you're doing the poor kid an injustice. Can't you imagine what it means to her to come here and be friends with you and me and to be made much of ? "

" And to be helping you with your work and being flattered for doing it and being in your confidence, in the most intimate relation short of being married to you, I *can* imagine it, and I can imagine how dangerous it must be for a sensitive, impressionable little girl, a little girl chockful of sex, if I'm not mistaken."

" You are mistaken. She's absolutely simple-minded."

" I don't mean that she's aware of her sex, you silly ; I don't suppose she knows she's in love with you. But just because she doesn't know it there's danger. If it was anybody else but her you'd see it."

" What I can't see is what I'm to do about it."

"Do nothing. Nothing. Don't take any notice of her. A little wholesome neglect is what she needs."

"That's all very well. I must praise her when she does so splendidly."

"I wouldn't," said Hilda.

"Besides," he added, "you're utterly mistaken."

"Am I? Well, you'll see."

And before very long, with his eyes wide opened, Christopher saw what he might never have seen had not Hilda opened his eyes. It made him sorry for Mona, so sorry that for the life of him he could not be cold to her.

XIX

MONTHS passed. They were in June now of nineteen twenty-four. And many times he had driven Mona in the car, and many times he had taken her to a dinner in town and a play. Hilda knew nothing about these evenings ; she thought that he was with Grevill Burton. And Christopher was afraid that she would say something to Grevill and that Grevill would deny having seen him, and this fear was the beginning of a sense of guilt. It was the first time ~~that he had~~ concealed anything that he had done from Hilda. Not, he said to himself, that there was any harm in it ; there was no reason on earth why he shouldn't take Mona to the play. But he knew that Hilda would disapprove, and he shrank from the expression of her disapproval.

It seemed to him in these days that she had grown cold to him and indifferent, and she was more than ever absorbed in Richard.

And Mona's ways were enchanting. He liked to feel the excited, happy little thing beside him, to hear her chatter about Sally and Amy and what Billy and Dicky were doing. He would tease her gently.

"Your unkindness to Billy and Dicky makes my heart bleed for them."

"Oh, but it wouldn't be kind to be kinder—it really wouldn't. It's for their good."

And he wondered: Would it be kinder of him not to be so kind? Kinder to leave her? Would it be for her good?

But what would she do without him? He ~~liked~~ liked to think that he could give her these pleasures, that he was the source of all the joy that came into her life. So he went on.

He found himself thinking of her now when she was not there, recalling her pretty ways, the turn of her head, the gestures of her hands, hearing her quaint reiterated "Oh! Mr. Vivart!"

—finding that he dwelt half with pleasure, half with amusement on the thought that she loved him. Oh, he knew it now. Hilda was not mistaken. He knew it by the flush of joy in her face when she came to him, by the trembling of her breasts and by the adoration of her eyes. And he put from him the question: What am I to do about it? And day after day their work brought them together.

One late afternoon she was with him in his study. She was weighing letters on the scales when one of the weights slipped from her fingers and rolled under the table. Mona went down on her knees to look for it; she was kneeling beside him. And suddenly, before he knew what he was doing, he had put his arm round her and lifted her to her feet. She yielded to his arms, drawing herself close against his breast; and, as he held her, desire came upon him and he stooped and kissed the tender, fragrant, privet-white nape of her neck. She twisted herself closer with a little wriggle of all her body. Then he put her from him.

"Forgive me," he said, "I oughtn't to have done that. I can't think why I did—I'm sorry."

"You needn't be. You mustn't be sorry."

"I'll never do it again."

"I don't care if you do. I—I'd let you do anything—anything," she whispered.

He pulled himself together, he pretended not to have heard her. "You'd better go home if you've finished," he said coldly.

She was quick to feel his coldness. "Oh, are you angry with me? It wasn't my fault."

He softened. "No, it wasn't your fault, poor child. It was mine."

"Why did you do it?"

"Because I love you."

"You—love—me?"

"Yes. But, look here, we must be good. You must go."

But Mona did not go, she stood staring at him, her lips parted; she panted slightly. Then she spoke.

"Oh, but I love you too."

"You mustn't. You mustn't, darling. Go, please go."

"I don't want to."

"You must. I—I don't know what I'm doing. For God's sake, go."

"I'll go if you'll kiss me."

"I won't kiss you. I'll never kiss you again."

"Well, I'll go. I'll do anything you want."

He opened the door. She went out. And as she went she turned on him a look, sidelong and sweet and humble, utterly submissive.

He flung himself into a chair and covered his face with his hands.

Why had he done it, why? And why had he told her that he loved her? And was it true? Was he sure of it himself? Yes, he was sure, he was trembling even now with the force of his passion. It was love of a sort, love of her mouth and eyes, love of her young privet-white body. So strong was it that he couldn't think now why he had let her go.

Why had he told her that he loved her? Because—because it was an insult to kiss her

and not say that he loved her ; because, having kissed her, he owed her the truth. That was as far as he could see through the dark tangle of his consciousness.

And what was he going to do now ? What was he going to do ? One thing was certain, it must never happen again, and if it was not to happen he must never see her again. He must write to her and tell her so. But letters were dangerous things. He must write without any expression of emotion, without any reference to what had passed. She would understand. Luckily her work on his last book was finished. He had a pretext. He wrote :

“ DEAR MISS RYLAND,

“ As the work is now finished I shall not want you again. I shall not be writing another book for some time, and I can attend to the proofs myself. I have to thank you for your skill and for all the trouble you have so kindly taken for me. If you want a testimonial you can apply to me——”

(No, she mustn't apply. She might apply in person.)

"If you want a testimonial I will send you one.

"Sincerely yours,

"CHRISTOPHER VIVART."

"It'll make her unhappy," he thought, "but that can't be helped. It had to be done."

He was half afraid that she would come to him to protest, to plead, she would break down before him and cry. But Mona did not come.

At luncheon Hilda said, "Mona hasn't come to-day or yesterday."

"No," he said, "she's not coming again. I told her not to."

Hilda looked at him, queerly, he thought.

"Perhaps," she said, "it's just as well."

"Just as well. That's the end of that."

XX

AND as the days went on without her, a great and heavy melancholy came upon him. He kept on thinking about Mona, he was haunted by the vision of her face, by the sound of her voice, the touch of her fingers, the silken touch drawn slowly, lingeringly across his hand, as if she were unwilling to let go. He became cross and irritable. He didn't know how he was going on without Mona, but he made no attempt to get her back again.

"Kit," said Hilda, "is anything the matter?"

"No, what should be the matter?"

"I don't know. You haven't seemed quite yourself lately."

"I'm at a loose end. I want to write another book, and I can't."

" I know that's misery," she said.

" It is misery. You mustn't mind if I'm a brute sometimes."

" I don't," said Hilda. She minded nothing but Richard and his crying.

A month passed without any news of Mona. Her silence showed him how deeply she was hurt. Then early in one evening in July a letter came. He knew the pretty handwriting. His hand trembled as he opened the envelope. What had Mona to say to him? Perhaps she had only written for her testimonial. He read :

" DEAR MR. VIVART,

" Will you come and see me? I have been ill and I am very miserable. I think if I were to see you—only once—I should feel better. Don't say you won't come. Really I have been and still am ill. I am in my old room where you once came to see me. Do you remember?

" Yours always,

" MONA RYLAND."

He thought : " I won't go. I won't go. I shall only make a fool of myself. There's no good beginning that over again. I won't go."

But the vision of Mona rose up before him, white and ill, changed from her pretty self. He saw her waiting for his letter, he saw her opening it, reading it, the cruelty of it crushing her, he heard her sob of despair, he saw her anguish.

" I can't," he thought. " I can't. She's ill. I can't hurt her. I'll go."

And he went ; that moment, without writing to her, he went.

Mona's room was in Tavistock Place, Bloomsbury.

At the top of the stairs her door stood ajar, as if she listened for him. He knocked. She said " Come in," in a weak, sad voice.

He went in. She came forward. She was white, white, the colour was gone even from her mouth, and she moved slowly, draggingly, and all of a piece, as if hypnotised.

" Oh, Mr. Vivart, is it you ? I knew you'd come. You couldn't be so cruel as not to."

"Of course I came."

He looked round him. A narrow bed was drawn up on one side, a little table stood behind it by the window. On the other side of the window a chair. A washstand by the door; another chair beside the fireplace on the wall facing the bed, a chest of drawers beyond the fireplace; a narrow passage covered by a strip of worn carpet, between these objects and the bed. Mona's jacket and hat hung on a hook on the door.

"Don't look at it," she said, "it's awful."

"Have you lived here long?"

"Nearly two years and a half. I have my meals downstairs with the other boarders, except my tea. I have that up here. I'll make you some."

"Don't bother. It's too late. I want to know how you are."

"I'm better now."

"What is it?"

"Anæmia. Very bad anæmia. That's why I'm so white."

"You don't eat enough."

"The meals are so nasty here I never want to eat."

"Poor little girl, I wish——"

"What do you wish?"

"I wish you could come back to us."

"Mayn't I? You must be beginning another book soon."

"I'm afraid not. It's better not, dear."

"It isn't better for me," she said.

"Yes, better for you."

"That's not true. I know what you mean and it's not true. You're wrong, wrong, wrong."

"My dear, what can I do?"

"Do? Do? You know what you can do if you really love me. You *said* you loved me."

"I do love you. But we can never be anything to each other. There's Hilda."

"Don't talk to me about Hilda. Hilda doesn't love you like I love you. Nobody could love you like that."

"It's sweet of you, darling, but it won't do. It won't do. You must try not to love me."

" I have tried, all these weeks I've tried, ever since you sent me away. And it's no good. I shall die of it."

" Oh no, you won't die, Mona ; people don't."

" I shall, I tell you. You don't know how ill I've been."

" I can see how ill you've been. Have you got a good doctor ? "

" Oh, very good, very kind and clever."

" You must let me help you. You must let me pay. And I'll send you some nice things to eat."

" I don't want anything. I don't want you to pay."

" Surely, surely you'll let me do that little thing for you. What's the good if I can't do things for you ? "

" Oh, nothing's any good. Nothing."

" Don't say that. I want you to know that I'm always there, ready to help you."

" That's not what I asked you to come for. It's not what I want."

" Of course it isn't, but now I *have* come——"

Now you have come I only want you to love me."

"But I do love you. Haven't I told you?"

"You haven't shown it much."

"How can I? How can I? I'm afraid for my life of you, Mona."

"Afraid of me? How can you be afraid of me when I love you?"

"That's why. I'm afraid of what you may make me do."

"You needn't be afraid. I shan't make you do anything you don't want to. I wouldn't have you if you didn't want me."

"But I do want you. I want you frightfully."

He hadn't meant to say it, but her eyes, fixed on him with longing, compelled him. Her eyes were very blue in the faintly sallow whiteness of her face. Her beauty was morbid, and it had a morbid fascination for him, it drew him more powerfully than the flushed beauty of her health. He struggled with himself.

"Only," he said, "I can't have you."

"Why not? You can have me if you want

me. If you really want me. I said I'd do anything for you, anything."

He rose. "Supposing then you come and dine with me. I'll take you in a taxi and bring you back in a taxi."

They would be safe, he thought, in a crowded restaurant. He must put crowds between them, and noise, and the safe sanity of eating. He must do it at once before he lost his head. He felt that if he stayed in that room another minute he should lose his head.

Mona agreed. She put on her hat. They drove to a restaurant in Jermyn Street that he knew of. White pillars with gilded fluting, gilded Corinthian capitals, crimson velvet seats and a number of little white-clothed tables. Crimson shaded lamps hung down from the ceiling.

•

Christopher led her to a table in the corner. They were safe there. A clamour of voices rose from the crowded room, the waiters dashed from table to table, the noise and movement kept them safe, eating kept them safe. Mona ate

with a greedy preoccupation, sensually, with a pure animal joy in the act that amused him. She was made for pleasure. It was cruel that her pleasures should be so few and far between.

"Are you enjoying yourself?" he said.

"Awfully. The food here's topping."

"Some coffee?"

"Please."

"A liqueur?"

"If you're having one."

The waiter hovered.

"I will if you will. What will you have? Benedictine, Kümmel, crème de menthe?"

"Oh, crème de menthe."

"One benedictine, one crème de menthe."

He felt gloriously safe."

But in the taxi going home, she put out her little hand and stroked the edge of his coat, caressing it; he moved and his hand touched it; without thought, without will, he took her hand in his. At that she pressed close to him; without thought, without will, he put his arm round her and drew her closer; she lay back in his arm

with her head on his breast. Sudden lamplight disclosed them to the passers by; and he didn't care; he was past caring. And inside him a voice said "What next? What next?"

At her door he paid for the taxi and dismissed it. He was not quite certain what he had done that for, but he said to himself that he would walk to the Tube Station.

Her door was open. She stood on the threshold.

"Will you come in?" she said. "It isn't late."

"Well, just for a minute." He mumbled indistinctly, his voice suddenly thick. Without thought, without will, he went in.

It was still twilight in the little room.

"Shall I light the lamp?" she said.

"No. Don't."

He sat awkwardly on the little straight-backed rush-bottomed bedroom chair. Mona sat in the cane chair by the window. The stillness and darkness of the big house gathered round them.

When Mona's chair creaked it sounded like a frightful indiscretion.

Christopher sighed. His sigh filled the room with a sudden sadness. He got up from his chair and knelt down at her feet, hiding his face against her knees.

"Mona," he said, "Mona."

She did not answer, but her troubled breathing sounded loud in the quiet room.

"You said you'd do anything for me—anything."

"So I will."

"Will you give yourself to me, now, tonight?"

"Yes," she whispered. "I will."

"Do you know, darling, do you know?"

"Yes. I know."

He rose, lifted her up and carried her to the bed and laid her there.

XXI

“ How am I to see you again ? ” she said.

“ You must come again and work for me. I shall begin another book. You must bring the manuscript to me in my room in the High Street. Nobody will come to me there. We shall be all alone.”

“ That will be to-morrow ? ”

“ The next day. And there's another thing. I don't like your living in this small room. It isn't good for you. I shall take rooms for you in a house I know of on Primrose Hill. There you'll have good air and the Park to walk in.”

“ I'm afraid I couldn't afford them.”

“ You won't have to afford them. That's my affair.”

“ I can't let you do ~~that~~ for me.”

" I'm doing it for myself, too. I can come and see you there."

" Oh, you are good to me, so good."

" It's little enough to give you a place to live in when you've given me yourself."

" But I was so glad, so glad. Tell me, did I make it happen, or did you ? "

" You made it happen."

" Oh, did I ? "

" Yes, and I made it happen, too. We both made it happen. Not one more than the other."

" You don't think I'm a bad girl ? "

" Of course I don't. How could I think you bad for being good to me ? "

" You won't turn round and despise me some day ? "

" Never."

" How long have you loved me ? "

He hesitated. Truly it seemed to him that he had never loved her till to-night.

" I don't know how long."

" I loved you the first day I saw you."

" Did you ? I wonder why."

"Because you were such a dear. You talked to me as if you liked me."

"I did like you."

"But you didn't love me all at once."

"Not all at once. It took time."

"It took me no time at all. That's the difference between you and me."

"Darling, I must go now."

"No, don't go. I don't want you to go."

"But I must. I shall see you the day after to-morrow. Half-past six. Over Trail's book-shop. You ring at the side door."

"It's cruel of you to go so soon."

"I'm sorry."

He put his arm round her and she clung to him tight, with a sinuous movement of her body, kissing him as if she would never have done.

At last he wrenched himself away and was gone.

And so there began for Christopher a life within his life, secret and hidden. Hilda said, "So Mona's come back again. I thought you'd given her up."

"I'm doing another book, and I can't get on without her. There isn't another typist like her."

"I don't think you're very wise."

"Oh, that's all right. There's nothing in your idea."

The lie stuck in his throat and tightened it.

"Well," said Hilda, "I hope so."

And she said no more. He could see that she was innocent of all suspicion. She didn't trust Mona, but she trusted him. And her innocence, her trust, were agony to him. Out of his intrigue with Mona he gained a deep sensual satisfaction, but that was all. There was nothing in his excitement to make up for his lacerating remorse.

One evening Hilda had gone to bed early, driven by a bad headache, and when he went to their room she was asleep. She lay on her side with her knees drawn up, and there was something in her attitude, in her sweet flushed face, her mouth slightly open for the passing of her breath, something in the curve of her

rounded hips that in its innocence, its helplessness, smote him with anguish. He stood by her bedside, looking at her, while tears cut through his eyelids and he choked and turned away.

In his bed, drawn up beside her, he could still hear her light breathing. He was penetrated with a sense of her hidden, mysterious being, of all that she had been to him and still was, and of his own awful, divided life. How, by what slow, secret stages had it come to this, that he was separated from her and unfaithful? Was it really that her absorption in the child had gradually detached him from her and so made unfaithfulness possible, or would it have happened in any case; would he, without that separation, have been Mona's lover? He didn't know. All that happened seemed to him strange but inevitable. There was no excuse for him but that of inevitability. It was bound to happen. It had been the sudden leaping out of the darkness of the beast in him, too long suppressed. He admitted that he had

a beast in him, an unsuspected, dark, hidden and secret beast. It, not he, had acted. In a sense he remained detached, untouched by its actions. There was a pure part of him that still loved Hilda. "After all," he said to himself, "I've taken nothing from her that she valued. Physical unfaithfulness is nothing." But though he said it was nothing, the thought of it stung him with an inappeasable remorse. Every look, every word of his wife reproached him. There were moments when he could have knelt at her feet and confessed everything and prayed for her forgiveness. But his secret was not his own; he had no right to betray Mona. Because she had given herself to him, about Mona, little sensual animal, there was a certain sacredness.

He had taken rooms for her in one of a terrace of houses overlooking Primrose Hill, on the first floor; a large airy sitting-room at the front with two windows and a balcony, a bedroom behind folding doors at the back. Here he came to her, at irregular intervals so as not to

excite Hilda's suspicion. He had a habit of going for a walk in the evenings. He would say to Hilda, " I'm going for a walk, you don't mind," and Hilda would answer, " No, of course not. It'll do you good," and he would hurry off to the house on the terrace.

Mona was a perfect mistress, sensual and loving ; she clung to him, insistent with small claims and exactions, but she was on the whole unselfish.

And as day after day passed and Hilda remained silent, a sense of impunity, of safety, gained on him. He risked imprudences. He took Mona to drive with him, and the drives could not be concealed altogether from Hilda. But she never said anything beyond an occasional " Do you think it's wise ? "

Meanwhile, in his fourth year, Richard was growing stronger. He had left off screaming. He cried no more than any ordinary, rather irritable child of his age. It was possible now to leave him all morning to the nurse. And one day Hilda came to Christopher.

"Kit," she said, "I can do your typing again now. You can let Mona go."

Christopher was taken aback. He hadn't thought of that. It was an awful moment.

"I couldn't think," he said, "of letting you in for that again."

"But I love being let in. I've nothing else to do now Richard doesn't want me."

"No. No. It's too much for you. You can read or you can go out. Much better for you."

"But, Kit, I did think that when Richard was all right I could work for you. I've always looked forward to it."

"But it isn't necessary now. Mona does very well for me."

Then she flashed at him, "If you'd rather have Mona——"

"It isn't rather having her."

Christopher pondered miserably. Then he had an inspiration. He could trust Hilda's heart.

"It's a little difficult. We've a sort of

responsibility. If I give her work to you we take the bread out of her mouth."

"I see. Perhaps it would be rather hard on her, poor little thing. There's no place where she'd be looked after as she is here."

"No. She loves it. We can't turn her away."

"I suppose we can't, but it's a nuisance."

"You do understand, darling?"

"Oh yes, I understand. We can't either of us be cruel."

She paused, and he thought it was all over. Then, "Kit," she said, "you can give up your room now."

He started inwardly. He couldn't give up his room. It was there that Mona came to him when he couldn't go to her.

"I don't think I will," he said. "I've got used to it. I rather like the walk there and back."

"Oh, but, Kit, I want you back again."

"What's the good? You don't see me."

"No, but I know you're there."

"Well, we'll see," he said ; but he knew he wouldn't give up his room.

He looked at her. No, she suspected nothing, her innocence, her amazing innocence, was his safety.

But he thought : "How long, I wonder, shall we be safe ?" A half-conscious trouble stirred his deep sense of security. But no, if he was moderately careful Hilda wouldn't know. She would never guess a thing that would be to her so monstrous, her mind wasn't made that way. Her little flash of jealousy had no suspicion in it. She was disappointed, that was all, wounded in the pride of her work, she who had once done everything for him. And how sweetly she had given in. Heavens, how good she was, how incapable of unkindness. What a brute, what an utter brute he was to her. Again remorse stung him.

And sometimes now, after this first alarm, his security was shaken. He had visions of some unforeseen accident revealing his secret ; he might be seen by some friend in the restaurant

with Mona or going in and out of the house on Primrose Hill. But what if he was seen? A man may dine with a friend in a restaurant without harm. Hilda, if she knew, could not seriously object to that alone. And a man may call at a house on Primrose Hill, any casual acquaintance might take him there. And the chances of Hilda's being told of his calling were negligible. Rather he had a sense of vast impending danger, of events, unknown and incalculable, gathering together to betray him, of some moment in which fatally he would betray himself.

And the moment came.

One day at luncheon Mona turned faint. With a ghastly white face and her head dropped to her breast, she slid from her chair. Christopher rushed to lift her up. And as he stooped over her, Hilda saw his face strained in a yearning agony. He carried Mona to the sofa; he pushed Hilda aside in his haste to fetch brandy. Tenderly, and still with that awful, betraying passion in his face, he raised Mona's head and

made her drink. And when she had come to she lifted up her arm and took his hand in hers.

"Kit, is that you?" she said.

Hilda gazed at them in silence.

Christopher got out the car and took Mona home. He was away for an hour and a half, far longer than the time it took to come and go.

And as he drove back he went over the scene. He could see himself rushing to Mona, he could see his own face now, drawn in its agony, he could see Mona's face looking at him and her hand seeking his own, he heard her "Kit, is it you?" He saw Hilda gazing at them and the horror in her eyes. He had no doubt that he was utterly betrayed. What would she say to him, and what would he say to her?

She was ready for him at the door-way. "Come," she said, "into the study. I want to speak to you."

He followed her slowly, his heart beating hard with pain. He would have given, gladly given, years of his life to have escaped this moment.

They sat down. Hilda did not begin all at once.

"Well," he said, "you had something to say to me."

"Yes. Kit, you're beginning to care for that little girl."

"What makes you think so?"

"Your face."

"My—face?" He smiled. A ghastly smile.

"Yes. You should have seen your face."

"I was frightened."

"It wasn't fright. It was—it was—I can't tell you what it was."

"Imagination."

"No. I couldn't imagine a thing like that. Kit dear, you mustn't see her. You must let her go. Believe me, it's the only way."

"The only way to what?"

"To keep out of trouble."

She didn't know that he was *in* trouble, as she called it.

"There won't be any trouble. You're imagining things. You always did imagine them."

"No, I tell you I'm not imagining this. Kit, darling, you can stop it if you try now. Give her up."

"Turn her away? How can we turn her away? Even supposing I was the sort of fool you think I am. You can't let her suffer for my folly."

"You admit the folly, then?"

"I don't admit anything at all. Of course, I like her. You can trust me to keep my head."

"Can I trust her? My dear, I heard what she said to you. And she grabbed your hand."

"She'd just come out of a faint and she was frightened."

"She called you Kit."

"Well, she does, you know. It's her way."

"It isn't a nice way."

"I don't see that. We're awfully good friends; there's no reason why we shouldn't be. It's all right. Really, it's all right."

There was nothing for it but to lie, to lie and lie, and lie solidly. If he lied with sufficient plausibility he was safe. Hilda didn't suspect

the worst. She was far from knowing that anything had happened.

"Well," said Hilda, "it may be all right. But oh, my dear, be careful."

"Oh, I'll be careful."

He felt that he had escaped from a sword that was about to fall on him, that, miraculously, had not fallen. And he made two resolutions. He would give up his room to divert Hilda's suspicion, and he would not take Mona out driving any more.

But now, after that betrayal, he was more than ever insecure. He had escaped only through Hilda's innocence and faith in his word. Another woman would have nailed him to it, would not have let him go. And again he had that sense of events gathering round him to betray him, of being in a net, a net that tightened.

He still had his room for another week. And on the last day of the week Mona came to him there. And she gave herself to him because it was for the last time in that room.

"Just so that we can always remember," she said.

She had not left him, she had not begun to prepare for departure, when a knock came at the locked door.

"Who's there?" said Christopher.

"It's I, Hilda. Can I come in?"

"Put on your hat, for God's sake, Mona." He unlocked the door. "Come in."

But Mona did not put on her hat. She sat still on the couch, staring, terrified. And Hilda looked at her; she saw her tumbled hair, her flushed face, her mouth still slack with passion, her opened blouse, and behind her the tossed cushion with a hollow in it where her head had lain. Then she turned to Christopher.

"There's a telegram for you."

She laid it down on the table and faced Mona who was standing now and, with fingers that trembled violently, fastening her blouse.

"As you've done all that you came for you'd better go."

Mona burst out crying. Christopher gave her her hat, her jacket ; he opened the door for her, and she went out. But before she went Hilda saw Christopher put his hand on her shoulder for comfort and protection.

Then they stood face to face.

" There's no need to lie any more. I can see what has happened."

He was silent. The pain at his heart dragged tighter. In all his visions of betrayal he had never see it come like this, with this shame.

" Have you anything to say ? " she said.

" There's no use saying anything. You've seen."

" I'm glad you've left off lying. Why did you lie to me, Kit ? "

" Good God, what could I do but lie ? I couldn't betray her. Besides, I wanted to save you pain."

" Yet because of you she's betrayed herself."

" Yes, it's my fault. It's been my fault all along. You mustn't think it was hers."

" I do think it was hers, too."

"No, she didn't know what was happening. Till I broke down."

"Oh, Kit, how could you? How could you?"

"I went mad."

"Why couldn't you let her alone in the beginning?"

"Because I suppose I was fond of her even then. I'm damned sorry. I tell you I went mad and lost my head. I'd undo it all if I could."

"Will you give her up?"

He stood silent, staring at Mona's little muslin handkerchief which she had left behind and he had picked up, handling it tenderly because it was hers. He stared as if the little handkerchief could tell him something, something that would see him through this agony.

"Will you give her up?"

"You mustn't ask me that, Hilda. I can't."

"You aren't mad now."

"I am. I want her. I want her. I can't do without her. I won't give her up."

"Then, Kit, you must give me up."

“ How do you mean, give you up ? ”

“ I mean that I won't take the children away as I might do, I won't go and live with mother, I'll stay with you and keep your house for you, I'll sit at your table and receive your friends as if nothing had happened, but I won't sleep with you, I won't walk or drive with you, I won't have more to do with you than I can help. You'll be there, in the house, as if you weren't there.”

“ Isn't that rather cruel of you ? ”

“ What's my cruelty to yours ? I've asked you to give Mona up. You won't, and I won't share you with her.”

“ Very well, you can make your own terms.”

“ I shall make them. They would be hard terms if you cared for me, but as you don't I can't see what difference they make.”

“ I do care for you.”

“ You insult me by saying so.”

“ Insult you ? ”

“ You insult my intelligence. But if you'd given her up, if you'd shown me that you cared

for me so much, I'd have taken you back and said no more. As it is, I shall say no more. There's no more to be said."

"You've said enough. At any rate I know where we stand. It's odd," he said, "you haven't thought of divorcing me. Or have you?"

"No, I haven't. I shall not divorce you, on the children's account. Besides, I think that this madness or whatever it is will be over some day. It can't last for ever."

"I'm afraid it'll last our time. If it *was* all over would you take me back?"

"Yes. If it was really all over I'd take you back. Why did you ask me that?"

"Because I wanted to know—the extent of your goodness. You are good to me, Hilda. Cruel and good. But I've deserved your cruelty. I suppose you know our life together is going to be hell? You'd much better divorce me."

"Do you want to be divorced?"

"No."

" You don't want to marry Mona ? "

" No, I don't. I was thinking of you."

" Then I won't divorce you. I should loathe it, the shame and the publicity. There's not much left to us, but we must make the best of it."

" You propose to treat me like a criminal and you call that making the best of it. I'm to be there as if I wasn't there."

" I tell you I won't share you with Mona, that's all. That might have been possible, if I didn't care for you. As it is, you can't have your wife and your mistress too. If you prefer your mistress it's your own doing, not mine."

" If I could only make you see how it happened."

" I do see. What you did in the beginning was madness, and I could have forgiven it. What you are doing now is deliberate and it's unforgivable."

" I'm not asking you to forgive me."

" No, not even that."

She turned away.

" Oh, Hilda, don't go. Look here, I'm sorry. I'm frightfully sorry. I'd have given anything for it not to have happened."

" There's no use your saying that so long as it goes on happening."

" I know. But you can't be in love with a woman and not want her. I've simply got to have Mona and there's an end of it."

" Oh yes, Kit, there's an end of it. I suppose you'll be home for dinner ? "

" I suppose so."

And she left him.

XXII

THEN his long punishment began, a punishment that was always with him, in the banishment of Mona from his house, in Hilda's cold "good morning" and "good night" without a kiss, in their dreadful silent meals, in the long evenings when they sat one on each side of the fireplace without speaking. Always the thought of his transgression came between them. He was not allowed to forget it for a minute. He would try and make a conversation. Thus, at breakfast :

"Is Richard all right?"

"Yes."

"What are you going to do to-day?"

"I don't know."

"Are you going out?"

"Yes."

" Will you come for a drive with me ? "

" You know I won't."

" Well, that's that."

His work carried him through the greater part of the day. Mona typed his manuscripts in the house on Primrose Hill and brought them to him in his room in the High Street. (He had kept it on after the rupture.) Every afternoon now he took her for a drive ; there was no longer any need for caution ; now that he had been found out, he considered that he could do what he liked.

But the dreadful evenings came when Hilda sat with her book held up before her face so as not to see him, and never a word. He read, but his thoughts wandered, the image of Mona came between him and the printed page with the memory of his sin, the vision of yesterday and of intolerable to-morrows ; day after day, the same silence, the same turning away of his wife's sad face.

If he had not loved Hilda ! But he did love her, more than ever he loved her in this

time of their separation. The sensual tie that bound him to Mona was a thing apart, a thing that had nothing to do with the deep, unchangeable self that loved Hilda. But it was there, and he could not break through and end it. The dark beast was ineradicable. He felt no resentment of Hilda's attitude. She was deeply injured and she had a right to any attitude she chose.

Sometimes Grevill Burton would come and dine, and then Hilda would talk light-heartedly as if nothing had happened; she would be friendly and sweet and smiling. You couldn't have told that she was playing a part.

"You did do it well," said Christopher one evening when the guest had gone.

"I daresay. I don't want people to know there's anything wrong."

"You're shielding me?"

"I'm shielding myself."

Sometimes at nine o'clock he would get up and say,

"I'm going out, Hilda. Do you mind?"

"Whether I mind or not you'll go," she would say.

She knew where he was going.

But once, when he was sitting with Hilda, he had the sense of her eyes on him. He looked up. Her book had fallen to her lap and she was looking at him and her eyes were wet with tears.

"Hilda," he said, "we can't go on like this."

"We must. I can't help it."

"We can't. We're too unspeakably unhappy."

"My dear, you know how to end it," she said.

Then suddenly, in a flash, his will rose up.

"I will end it," he said.

"Will you, Kit? Do you mean it?"

"Yes, I'll go now and end it."

"End it so that it'll never happen again?"

"Yes. Never again."

He took his car and drove to Primrose Hill to save time. He must act at once while his will was strong in him or he might never act at all. He didn't allow his mind to dwell on what would come after, the vain longing, the

hunger and thirst, the fierce sting of desire and its miserable frustration. And Mona—he wouldn't think of Mona. Yet he did think of her, he thought of her when he would not think of himself. Well, Mona must bear it. She had had her good time, and he had never said that it would last for ever, or if he had said so he had not meant it. Surely from the beginning he had seen the end. And the end must come quickly, there must be no fumbling work ; one clean, cruel cut and all over. But, God, how was he going to do it ? Would he yield, first to his passion and then, afterwards, tell her ? No, there must be no yielding. If he gave in once he might give in again, there might be no ending to it then. He must strike a clean blow, at once, the first minute, without a kiss, without a touch, without any words of tenderness.

In the large lighted front room Mona waited for him. She ran to him and put up her arms to hold him.

“ Dear, I knew you would come to-night.”

He took her hands and pushed her from him.

"Don't," he said. "Don't. I mustn't touch you. I haven't come for that."

She scowled, suddenly evil.

"What *have* you come for?"

"I've come to tell you we must end it. I mustn't see you any more."

"Not—see me—any more? But, Kit, why not? What's happened to you?"

"Nothing's happened except that I want to end it."

"Oh, but it's cruel of you, cruel. Why should you want to end it when we've been so happy?"

"Well, I don't want, but I must."

"But why, why?"

"These things have to end some day, Mona. They can't go on for ever."

"Some day, but not now. Not now."

"Yes, now."

"But you haven't told me why."

"Because it's making my wife too unhappy."

"You don't care about making *me* unhappy."

"I do care, but I can't help it. Whoever's unhappy, she mustn't be. You don't know

what it's like, Mona. There's been nothing but the misery of the damned ever since she found out. She won't speak to me or touch me or look at me if she can help it. And all the time her heart's breaking. To-night she cried."

"She cried, did she? Well, let her cry, it won't hurt her."

He sat down and she flung herself on the floor beside him, clinging to his knees, pressing herself close.

"Get up, Mona. Don't do that."

"I shall. I shall. Till you've told me you won't leave me. You can't leave me. Why, you loved me last night. Only last night."

"I mustn't love you any more."

"But you can't help it. You *do* love me. You love me more than Hilda."

"No, I don't. It's a different sort of love. It's not the best sort. I can stop loving you, but I can't stop loving Hilda."

"It's a lie, you can't stop loving me."

"I can. I can make myself. I'm sorry, Mona."

"I don't care for your sorrow. I shall hate you if you leave me."

"Hate me, hate me, that's the best thing you can do."

"I shall hate you, but I shall die of it. I shall kill myself."

"You won't. You only think you will. You don't even think it. Do look at it seriously. We oughtn't ever to have done this. The whole thing's wrong."

"Is it? You wanted it, and now you've got all you wanted you want to be good. I loathe your goodness. It's nothing but cruelty."

"I'm sorry if it's cruel. But it's cruel to Hilda to go on. She's had enough. I won't let her be hurt any more."

"Kit," she said, "she needn't be hurt. Go and tell her you've broken it off. And let's go on as we did before. If we're careful she'll never know."

"That would be beastly. I've had enough of lying. No. There's nothing for it but to end it, clean."

He rose.

"I must go now."

He raised her from the floor where she lay. She turned on him a look of hatred. She was suddenly transformed there; her sweet face was all evil.

"Go then," she said. "I hate you."

"Look here, I don't want you to be worse off because of this. I'll keep on these rooms for you and I'll pay you what your work cost me."

"I don't want your money. I don't want these rooms."

"You'll have to have them all the same. And if you're ever in trouble you must let me know."

"Trouble? What do you call this?"

"I know," he said. "I know."

"You know, but you don't care."

"I do care. I hate what I've done, but I had to do it."

"You hadn't, you hadn't."

She was crying now. He hardened his heart against her crying.

" Good-bye, Mona."

She did not answer. He turned from her and left her.

At home in the study, Hilda was sitting up for him.

She turned to him, half-eager, half-afraid.

" Well," he said, " it's all over. It was damned butcher's work, but I've done it."

" Oh, Kit, I'm so glad."

She came to him and put her hands on his shoulders and kissed him.

" I suppose," she said, " it was horrible."

" Horrible."

He put up his hands to her hands and took them and kissed her, and they stood still for a moment, holding each other's hands.

" Have you forgiven me ? " he said.

" Yes, I've forgiven you. I forgave you long ago. You see, Kit, I always understood how it happened. You had Mona like a physical illness, and you've got over it, and you'll be well. It'll never happen again. It's not as if you went to her with your mind."

He smiled. "If you understand so well why were you such a devil to me?"

"Because, my dear, I wanted you to come back."

"I see, you made the position untenable."

"Impossible. But aren't you glad to be back?"

"Glad? I was never so glad of anything in my life. Always, in my heart, I hated going to Mona."

"And yet you went."

"I went. But it's all over."

"I know it's all over. We'll never speak of it again."

"There's only one thing. Mona said she'd kill herself. She won't, will she?"

"Of course she won't. She loves her life, her little sensual life, too well to take it."

And Mona did not kill herself. Instead, she wrote letters which Christopher burnt without answering. And presently she left off writing.

XXIII

It was June nineteen twenty-five.

Christopher was alone in his study. He had given up his room in the High Street and worked at home now. He hated the room in the High Street and everything in it, the writing-table heaped with manuscript, the armchair where Mona used to sit, the couch where she used to lie ; these things recalled too painfully the time of his passion.

An open letter lay on his table. He took it up and turned it in his hands. It was from Mrs. Templeton, the seventh of the same kind that had come within the last month. Mrs. Templeton would be delighted if he would come to tea to-morrow at four-thirty.

Mrs. Templeton was a widow who had arrived ~~six~~ weeks before with a letter of introduction

from Grevill Burton. Delicately, irresistibly she had inserted herself into his life. He had gone to see her five times and she had been as many times to his house.

Would he or would he not go? He couldn't plead his work. Mrs. Templeton knew that he was not working. His last novel, "The Hypocrite," had been finished a week ago and he was resting for the first time in many months.

Would he or would he not go? He didn't ask himself why there was this struggle in his mind over a thing so simple. He sat down and wrote.

"Dear Mrs. Templeton,

"I am so sorry——"

He tore up the note and wrote again :

"Dear Mrs. Templeton,

"Many thanks. I shall be delighted to come to-morrow at four-thirty.

"Yours very sincerely,

"CHRISTOPHER VIVART."

When the time came to start he went to Hilda.

"I shan't be in for tea. I'm going to Mrs. Templeton's."

"You're always going there. Don't you get tired of her?"

"No. She's not the sort of woman you get tired of."

"I'm tired of her," said Hilda.

At The Gables, her house on West Heath, Mrs. Templeton waited for him in her drawing-room. The room was beautiful, full of clear tones of ivory and rose. There were roses everywhere, pink and white and red, in vases and in bowls. Their scent filled the room.

As he came in she rose, holding out both her hands.

"How good of you to come."

"Good of you to ask me."

"I'm not destroying any great work? No. You wouldn't let me destroy. You'd tell me, wouldn't you?"

"I'm not doing anything."

"Then the last book is finished?"

" Yes."

" How exciting. How is dear Hilda ? And little Jenny and Richard ? "

" Oh, they're all very well, thanks."

" I don't ask you together, because I get the best of both of you when I have you alone. We have so much to talk about, haven't we ? Sit down there."

He sat down on the sofa beside her.

Audrey Templeton was thirty-three years old and looked five years younger. Her sweet delicate face was white with a pearl grey tint and very beautiful. This neutral colour made her blue eyes exceedingly blue ; long black eye-brows arched above them and they had thin violet smears underneath. Her long slender nose had a little ridge in the middle and a tip that moved with the movements of her wide, thin mouth. Her black hair was parted in the middle and rose thickly and was twisted in a large roll at the back. Her body was slight and tall, with a long waist and long slender limbs ; there was grace in all her movements.

She wore a gown of some thin black stuff and a pearl necklace. And her voice, her voice was beautiful, with full golden notes that dropped rounded and perfect, like the notes of a bell.

She gave him tea, putting a sort of tender kindness into all the gestures of her service. Her eyes hovered, they opened wide doors, taking him in gently.

When tea was over she said, "Come and see my books."

She led him to the bookcase and there, among the masters, on a line with Turgeniev and Dostoievsky, he found his own novels.

She pointed them out to him with a little laugh.

"There you are. You see, I have you all. 'The Transgressor,' 'The Idealist,' 'Peter Harden' and dear 'Anne Bywater.'"

"You've read them all?"

"Not once, but many times."

"I'm honoured."

"Oh no, it's nothing to you that I should read you."

When she smiled her eyes narrowed, curling upwards at the corners.

"It's everything," he said.

She swept back again to her sofa. A clear, delicious scent hung about her and stirred with her moving. She was beautiful to every sense.

"Now tell me about this last book. What is it called?"

"'The Hypocrite.' It's a study in hypocrisy."

"What a subject. A subject made to your hand. What do you think of it? Do you feel that you've done your best?"

"I don't know yet. I'm too near it. It's been so intensely difficult and I'm tired."

"Tired? Ah, that's good. That means that your strength has gone into your book."

"I hope so. I hope the book doesn't show signs of exhaustion."

"I'm sure it doesn't. You shouldn't talk about exhaustion. You're young still."

"Forty-two."

"That's young. You are at the very height of your power now. I've watched you from the

beginning, seen you coming on and on, always maturing. 'The Transgressor' has all your youth, your wonderful, delightful youth, its passion and its freshness. It's almost adolescent. It fairly shines with youth. And in 'The Idealist' I see you growing up, wise and a little sad, and in 'Peter Harden' you are mature with all your experience behind you, and yet you have still the passion of your youth. And in 'Anne Bywater' you are more mature—you've come to your full flowering. There's the experience of long ages in that book, and a subtlety, an uncanny subtlety. I wonder whether any novelist ever knew women as you know them. When I read it I had the sense of being Anne Bywater. I felt that you'd opened up my heart and spirit to me."

"But do you know—you're not unlike Anne Bywater. Only I think she has more passion in her."

"Ah, you may know Anne Bywater, you don't know me if you say that. I see all my possibilities in Anne."

“ I don’t believe you would give yourself as Anne does.”

“ Would I not ? I wonder. Does one really know oneself ? ”

“ Probably not. You would go to the last limit and then something would draw you back. There’s a line that you would never cross, the line that Anne crossed.”

“ Do you think I should be afraid ? ”

“ No, you wouldn’t be afraid. But there’s a fineness in you, a conscience which would keep you from ever letting yourself go.”

“ And yet I think that if my moment came I should be capable of anything.”

“ You think. You think because you’re accustomed to thinking boldly and clearly round any subject, to measuring all possibilities ; you’re given to free psychological speculation, and you’ve no conceit of your own virtue. But you would end with thinking. Your sense of dignity would stop you from all passionate action. Passion has no dignity except the dignity of its courage.”

" Ah, the dignity of courage ; you think I would not have that ? "

" I said you wouldn't be afraid. It wouldn't be fear that would hold you back ; it would be your sense of spiritual values, of something better than passion's best."

" Why do I think I could do what Anne did ? "

" Because passion appeals to you through its generosity and you are generous. But you're safe because you're religious. Your spiritual life is more to you than any other."

" What do you know about my spiritual life ? I've never told you anything about it."

" No, but I know it's there. You give me a sense of absolute security and peace. Nobody has your serenity, your strength, without an inner life of the very highest spirituality. It's because of your secret safety that you can afford to wonder whether there's an Anne in you."

" But you said I was like her."

" Because Anne had her spiritual side. She longed for the vision of ultimate reality."

"The vision of ultimate reality? Yes, I long for it, too. But I never get it. Only a flash now and then when I see beauty."

"I know those flashes. They're worth all the rest of one's life put together."

"But they're so uncertain. You can't get them simply by longing for them. I may never have one again. If life were a succession of flashes——"

"You couldn't bear it. There's no such thing as a continuous ecstasy."

"You can conceive it."

"By adding flash to flash and imagining an endless series. But that's not feeling."

There was a brief silence; then suddenly she said:

"Has Hilda got that sense of ultimate reality?"

"I don't know. We've never talked about it."

"How strange. I should have thought that would have been the first thing you'd have known about her."

"It shows how little I know about her, after all."

"After all? How long have you been married?"

"Twelve years."

"Twelve years? It's a long time as marriage goes. But you're happy. You seem to be very happy."

"We *are* very happy."

"I'm so glad. She's a darling. I wish she liked me better."

"Oh, but she does like you." (He wasn't sure of it.)

"No, when I'm with her I always feel something like a wall between us. I can't get at her. She doesn't trust me."

"I'm sure she does. How could she not trust you?"

"I don't know how. But she doesn't. And I should so like to be her friend. I don't like to feel that I'm her husband's friend and not hers. We ought all three to be bound together."

" I think you're mistaken. But Hilda's very reserved. She doesn't give herself easily. And there are some things she never talks about. Such a conversation as we've just had would be impossible between you and Hilda or between Hilda and me."

" Then there's a whole world closed to you."

" Yes. It makes no difference to our affection, but there it is. A whole world closed."

" And yet with you I feel there's a whole world open. There are no closed doors, no ways we couldn't go together. I think there's nothing I couldn't say to you."

" I feel the same with you. There's nothing I couldn't say to you. You'd always understand."

" Yes, I don't think you could say anything I wouldn't understand."

" Some day I should like to tell you something about myself."

" You can't tell me now ? " Her voice was very tender.

" No. Not now. I must be going. I don't

like to leave Hilda too long. We don't have so very much time together when I'm working, so we try to see as much of each other as possible when I'm not."

"I wouldn't keep you from her for the world. Wait, there's just one thing I wanted to ask you, if it isn't too much."

"I don't think anything would be too much."

"It's this. Will you read 'The Hypocrite' to me? It would be such a pleasure to go over it with you word by word"

"Nothing would please me better. I wanted to know what you think of it. Now I shan't have to wait."

"Well, when will you come? Would tomorrow evening be too soon?"

"Not a bit. About nine o'clock?"

"About nine o'clock. But what about Hilda?"

"Oh, I'll take her for a long drive in the car. We'll start in the morning so we shall have all the day together. She won't mind my taking an evening off."

He held out his hand.

“ Well, good-bye,” she said. “ We’re good friends, aren’t we ? ”

“ We shall be always. Good-bye.”

She stood gazing at the door after he had let, as if still hypnotised by his presence. Then slowly she raised her arms above her head with clasped hands, and suddenly she brought them down and flung them out before her, driven by some feeling that expressed itself in that gesture of abandonment.

XXIV

HE went away with three very clear impressions : that Mrs. Templeton was a fascinating woman, that he was fascinated, and that there was a closed world between him and Hilda. He was not aware that these were the impressions Mrs. Templeton had meant him to receive. Above all that of the closed world. He had never known before that there was any point beyond which Hilda could not go with him. Their communion had seemed to him so perfect. And now he knew that it was imperfect, that the deepest things in life were precisely those he could not share with her. And he could share them with Mrs. Templeton. She could go all the way with him. There was no limit to her understanding. Into what unexplored countries might they not venture yet together ?

He waited impatiently for to-morrow evening, longing for the presence of that beautiful woman with her sympathy and grace.

The next evening before dinner Hilda said to him, "Kit, I wish you'd read 'The Hypocrite to me to-night.'"

"I can't. I'm going over to Mrs. Templeton's."

"Again? Whatever for?"

"To talk to her."

"Well, I should have thought you'd have had enough of her yesterday. You can ask her to dine here on Friday night if you like." (It was Tuesday.) "I'd rather she came here than that you went to her."

"Very well, I'll ask her."

The reading was a success. He read from the yet untyped manuscript. Mrs. Templeton listened like a woman enchanted. Every now and then she made a suggestion of which Christopher felt the justice and followed.

"You mustn't take me too seriously," she said. "It's only one person's opinion, after all."

"But you're right. I see you're right. It's wonderful how right you always are. Grevill Burton doesn't give me these tips and he's the best critic I know. I can't tell you how you help me."

"But Hilda helps you. She told me you read all your books to her; and you've dedicated them all to her. 'To my wife, without whose help this book would never have been written.' You see how I remember. To have earned that praise from you, what must she not have done?"

"May I dedicate this book to you?"

"To me? But I haven't deserved it. My poor little remarks are nothing."

"They've helped to make it better than it would have been without you."

"Well, if it must be so, I'm only too much honoured. And now please go on."

At half-past eleven he left her. He had read for two hours and a half.

Hilda lay awake watching for him.

"I thought you were never coming back again."

He laughed. "I haven't got it as badly as all that."

"But you've got it," she said.

His infatuation amused her, she couldn't believe that it was serious, and when he took her in his arms she was not aware that she owed his ardour to an excitement kindled by Mrs. Templeton.

And the next evening, and the next, he went to Mrs. Templeton's. In the morning of the third day Hilda asked him again to read "The Hypocrite" aloud to her. By this time he was tired of reading "The Hypocrite" aloud.

"I can't be bothered," he said. "You can read it to yourself when you type it."

"Darling, it isn't the same thing. I can take it in ten times better when you read it. I love the sound of your voice."

"Oh well, some day, perhaps."

He had not told her he was reading it to Mrs. Templeton. But that evening Hilda came into the hall as he was starting, and she caught him stuffing the manuscript into his coat pocket.

"You're going to read to *her*?" she said.

"Yes. She—she asked me."

"And I asked you and you wouldn't. Oh, Kit."

"Well, I get so tired of the beastly thing."

"I think you might have read it to me and not to her."

"I couldn't refuse her."

"And you could refuse me." Tears were in her eyes.

"Come, Hilda, you mustn't mind. It isn't my fault she got in first."

"It seems to me she's always getting in first. This is the third evening running you've been to her."

"Well, it doesn't do to break the reading. You lose the thread. I want her to get a total impression."

"*Her* impression counts. Well, go to her, go. I don't care."

He went, with a miserable sense of having done Hilda a wrong. Yet it was preposterous that she should try to keep him from going to

see Mrs. Templeton. If there ever was an innocent attachment, it was this. There was nothing in it that Hilda could possibly object to. He hadn't given her the smallest cause for jealousy. It wasn't as if he were in love with Mrs. Templeton. He knew perfectly well he was not in love with her. Not in love with *her*; in love, perhaps, with her delicate, enchanting mind. You couldn't be jealous of a mind. He was secure in the thought of his own innocence.

He finished the reading at ten o'clock and received Mrs. Templeton's "total impression."

"You have never done better than this," she said. "Your hypocrite is superb."

They discussed a few outstanding points and then he put the manuscript away.

"Do you remember my saying there was something I wanted to tell you? About myself?"

"Yes. I remember. Can you tell me now?"

"I should like to, if it isn't too late."

"No, it isn't too late. I sit up till all hours."

* "Well, do you remember saying that Hilda and I were very happy?"

"Yes. And you are happy, aren't you?"

"We are now. But we haven't always been. Last year we went through a terrible time."

"How was that?"

"It was my fault. I was unfaithful to her."

"You were unfaithful? Oh, poor Hilda."

"I know. We—she and I—had been drifting apart for nearly two years. Hilda was absorbed in the children and I was absorbed in my work. Richard was delicate. He screamed all day long, and I couldn't stand it, and I left the house and took a room to work in. And there was a girl. I had her to type my things. I went off my head over her. I sent her away once, before anything had happened, and I tried to get over it, but it was no use. We met again, and then—— It was perfectly awful, for I had to lie to keep Hilda from knowing about it. At last she found out."

Mrs. Templeton gave a low murmur of sympathy.

"Then it was simply hell. She wouldn't have anything to do with me. We lived on in the same house, hardly speaking to one another. She said she wouldn't share me with the other woman."

"Well, how could she? No self-respecting woman would."

"No. I suppose she couldn't. But I did think she might have let me off more easily."

"Did you deserve to be let off easily?"

"No, I'm afraid I didn't. But you don't know what it was like. For, you see, all the time I cared for Hilda. I cared for her even when I was going to that girl. It was as if it were another part of me that went. An unimportant part. Then I saw that Hilda was miserably unhappy. And I gave it up. I went to the girl and told her I had done with her. It was damnable, but I did it."

"It was splendid of you. And it must have been harder than if you had done it in the beginning before anything had happened."

"No, it wasn't. For you see I'd had her.

Nothing could take that from me. It would have been awful if I'd never had her."

"Well, perhaps. And then?"

"Then Hilda came round. It*seems that she'd always understood how it happened, how I'd gone mad, and how it was purely an affair of the senses, and that somehow it hadn't the importance it might have had if I'd gone deeper in. She said 'It wasn't as if you went to her with your mind.'"

"Ah no, that's the last unfaithfulness. You kept your mind clean."

"I think I did. It was never involved."

"And why have you told me this?"

"So that you may see the kind of man I am."

"But I don't see. It seems to me that it's the kind of man you're not. That in a sense it wasn't you who were unfaithful."

"I think that's what Hilda felt. She was an angel and forgave me. But I don't know whether she ever really got over it—whether she trusts me. I think she must be always

afraid that I'll break out some day and do it again."

"But it's all over, surely it's all over."

"Yes, it's all over. I simply couldn't go back to it. I hated it even at the time."

"But she can see—she can see that you're devoted to her."

"I *am* devoted to her. But she's very jealous. She wants me to herself."

"Of course she wants you to herself. Tell me—our friendship isn't making her unhappy?"

"Oh no, I'm sure it isn't. Why should it?"

"I don't know. Wives can be very difficult."

"I don't think Hilda'd be difficult about a thing like that. She's got any amount of good sense."

"Well," she said, "we must show her that we love her. It must be a happy friendship for all three."

"I think I must go now. She lies awake waiting for me."

"Yes go, dear friend, I won't keep you. I'm so glad you told me what you did."

He stooped and kissed her hand as he left her. Hilda was ready for him with her arms round his neck.

"Did you have a nice reading?"

"Yes. We've finished."

"I'm glad you've finished. Now we can have some evenings together, can't we?"

"We can."

"I wish Mrs. Templeton wasn't coming to-morrow."

"Come, you must be decent to her."

"Oh, I'll be decent."

The evening came. It began during dinner with Mrs. Templeton enquiring about the children.

"I suppose the darlings are in bed?"

"Long ago."

"Let me see, how old is Jenny?"

"Seven."

"And Richard?"

"Four."

"The lambs. Enchanting ages. Is Richard stronger than he was?"

"Much stronger."

"I'm glad. It must have been awful for you when he was ill."

"It was pretty awful."

"Is he learning lessons?"

"Yes, I'm teaching them myself."

"You haven't thought of sending them to a kindergarten?"

"No. I like teaching them. I like to see how their funny little minds work."

She thought: "She thinks I can't talk about anything but Richard and Jenny. She wants to make me feel that I'm the mother of Kit's children and nothing else besides. While *she's* his companion."

"But I've my work cut out for me now I've got Kit's typing to do as well."

"Why don't you have a typist?"

"Kit hates them."

"Oh, Kit hates them."

Mrs. Templeton thought: "She's jealous. She's afraid. She won't let him have a typist. That's why she does it all herself."

"You've read 'The Hypocrite' of course?"

"No, I've not—yet."

"You haven't? You should get your husband to read it to you."

"Beast," thought Hilda, "what right has she to tell me what I should get my husband to do?"

But she was silent. She looked at Christopher.

"I tell him it's the best book he's ever written."

"Is it?"

"Far and away."

"'Anne Bywater' was hard to beat."

"Oh, he's beaten her. But each book stands by itself. Each has its own glory."

"Do you hear that, Kit? You ought to blush."

"Oh, I'm past blushing."

"So sated with good opinions?" said Mrs. Templeton.

"So overwhelmed with yours."

"Well, when you two have done making pretty speeches to each other we'll go upstairs."

They went. The evening dragged on ; the conversation wandered ; it ranged through ancestor worship to spiritualism and from esoteric Buddhism to modern mysticism. Christopher felt that Hilda was lost ; he tried in vain to draw her in, to make her take her part ; she refused to put forth a spark. She seemed to say, " You two silly people may talk about what you like. I shall be wise and hold my tongue."

And when it was all over and Mrs. Templeton had gone, she said, astonishingly, " Kit, that woman's in love with you."

" She isn't. You've no business to say a thing like that."

" She is. Her eyes darken and shine when she looks at you, and her mouth trembles. She's in love and she's trying hard to get you."

" That's all rot. She doesn't want to ' get ' me as you call it. She's as innocent as Jenny."

" Oh, her innocence. I saw her trying to captivate you by a series of beautiful attitudes.

A woman doesn't move her body about like that without an intention."

" Her body moves unconsciously."

" Instinctively perhaps. But what an instinct."

" Hilda, you're intolerable."

" I may be, but I'm not a fool. I understand your dear Mrs. Templeton. Come, if you're coming."

And she switched off the lights.

Wounded and estranged and furiously indignant, he followed her upstairs to bed.

He couldn't sleep for thinking of Mrs. Templeton.

XXV

AND Christopher went again and again to Mrs. Templeton's. He took her driving in his car ; he was always dining with her ; and she came many times to lunch or tea or dinner at his house. He was restless when he was away from her. Hilda saw his restlessness and put it down to its true cause, but she said no more about Mrs. Templeton being in love with him. She behaved to her with a calm politeness that was almost kind. It was as if, in perfect fairness, she recognised the claims of her friendship with Christopher and agreed to it. They were Hilda and Audrey to each other. Of her burning jealousy and of her tears—for she cried in secret—Christopher saw no sign. He thought : " Hilda is really taking it well."

Then one day the proofs of "The Hypocrite" came and Hilda saw the dedication :

TO

AUDREY TEMPLETON

They were looking at the proofs together, their heads bent over them, almost touching. Hilda drew her head back as if before a blow.

"Kit," she said, "that's too much. If you *are* in love with her you needn't proclaim it to the world."

"My dear, a dedication isn't a declaration of love."

"It is," she said, "in your case. You might as well tell me outright that you love her. You needn't. I know it. I know it."

"You know nothing. I don't love her."

"Don't lie about it, Kit. I shall respect you better if you don't lie."

"My dear child, I like her—I like her. I like her awfully. But I do not love her. Neither does she love me. The thing's entirely platonic."

"It may be. It's love all the same. Oh, my dear, do you suppose I don't know the signs.

You're wretched when you're not with her, you're happy when you are."

"I am. I like being with her. She's so jolly kind and sympathetic. She makes you feel that it's good to be with her. But I'm not in love with her any more than she's in love with me."

"She is in love with you. I've told you that before."

"If she were it wouldn't do her any good. There's nothing between us. I've been faithful to you. I swear I've been faithful."

"You haven't. There's everything between you. Everything that matters. You've gone to her with your mind and your soul. You've taken everything I loved best in you and given it to her."

"My dear Hilda, this sounds like madness."

"It isn't madness. You know it isn't. It's the horrible truth."

"You talk as if I'd no right to have a friend."

"You've no right to have such a friend. A friend who takes your mind and soul from me."

I've seen her doing it. I've seen her fascinating your mind, fascinating, fascinating, oh, I own she's fascinating. She couldn't rest till she'd got you caught. She knew how to get you through your mind."

"On your own showing it's all jolly innocent."

"It isn't. To me it's worse than any physical guilt. I forgave you Mona, because I knew that was only your poor weak body yielding. It was a madness. It wasn't really you. I can see a point of view from which it would be utterly unimportant. You didn't give Mona what I cared for most."

"I've been faithful to you, Hilda," he repeated.

"Faithful? Do you think that faithfulness is only of the body? You know it isn't. I've heard you say so. This unfaithfulness of mind and soul is the worst, the most terrible unfaithfulness. It's brought me more suffering than ever Mona did. I've not known one happy moment since you took up with that woman. Because I know I've lost you utterly."

"Forgive me. I'd no idea you minded."

"Minded? How could I not mind? To see you going from me with your beautiful mind that I loved. It was *my* mind."

"It wasn't. My body may be yours, I hope it is, but my mind at least is my own."

"No, it's mine as much as your body. You gave it me. It's yours and it's mine. You'd no right to give it to that woman. I can never forgive you, Kit."

"I won't ask you to forgive me. I don't admit that I've done anything wrong."

"You've done most horribly wrong. No human being can do another a worse wrong."

"This is simply stupid exaggeration. You've no absolute right over my mind."

"I had a right. You've no idea how I loved your mind. We were joined together in our minds, it was there that we were most married. Nobody had a right to come and put us asunder. You know all this. Nobody knows it better than you. Just because your mind's so

beautiful you know it. There's no excuse for you, because you knew."

"You loved my mind——"

"Yes. Don't you know what it is to love a mind, to love it passionately, to feel it more you than yourself? I loved your mind more than I loved your body. And God knows I loved that."

"I see. I hadn't thought of that."

"You only thought of Audrey. And what can she do for you that I can't do? What can she be to you?"

"She has a wonderful mind, Hilda."

"Yes, but if a woman came with a wonderful body, you wouldn't go to her on that account. You wouldn't leave me for her?"

"It's what I did do, Hilda."

"And I tell you I don't care. You might have fifty Monas for all I should care now."

"I haven't left you for Audrey."

"Oh, but you have. I've just got to make up my mind to that, for I don't suppose you'll ever come back from her."

“ I don’t suppose I ever shall, and I don’t see why I should, if you call that leaving you.”

“ Then it’s all over between us. I shan’t try and keep you from Audrey, but I won’t share you with her any more than I shared you with Mona. We shall come and go, we shall live here together, I shall sleep with you, I’ll give myself to you if you want me—you haven’t deserved a physical separation ; you see I’m fair—everything will be as it was before, except that deep down in our hearts and minds it will be all over.”

“ It must be as you will.”

XXVI

It happened in September of this year, nineteen twenty-five, that the lease of the Eastcote house was up. Far End was empty.

And one day suddenly Christopher said, "Supposing we went back there."

"Kit, do you really mean it?"

"Yes. After all these years I believe we could bear it now."

"Do you mean, give up this house and go?"

"Give up everything and go."

"Could you give up everything? Could you give up Audrey?"

"Would it mean giving her up?"

"You'd have her down there?"

"It would be kind of you to ask her."

"Of course I'll ask her if you insist on having

her. I said I wouldn't keep you from her. But she'll spoil Far End. Her trail will be over everything."

"It's a beautiful trail, Hilda. She'd love the place."

"And I should hate her loving it. I can hear her raving."

"You're not kind, Hilda."

"No, I'm not. I used to be, but that's what it's done to me. I'm not kind. That's the worst of it. I can't be kind to Audrey. I might be if you weren't so kind to her."

"You needn't tell me you're jealous."

"Jealous? I wouldn't be Audrey for all I possess. Not even to have you running after me."

"Well, shall we go? We can let this house till the end of our lease."

"Yes. Let's go. We can't be more miserable there than we are here."

"I'll see to the removing. I'll go down by myself and get everything ready, and you shall follow with the children. You can go into

rooms when this house is empty. You won't have any trouble."

"That's good of you, Kit."

"No. I want it to be as it was when I first took you there."

She gave him a long look, yearning and uncertain, as if she hardly believed what she had heard him say. How could everything be as it was? And if he had Audrey down there——

"You'll find everything in its place, waiting for you," he said.

So Christopher went down to Far End, and in a week's time he wrote for Hilda and the children to join him there

XXVII

It was a glorious day in mid-October. The road went up, bright yellow between its green grass borders. The village was unchanged.

The house stood waiting behind its low wall, under its guardian elm, in a golden serenity of beauty. Tall chrysanthemums looked over the wall, the elm was yellowing ; but roses still bloomed on the terraces. Indoors everything was as it had been before, each piece of furniture stood religiously in its place. Christopher had done his work well.

Tea was ready for them in the drawing-room. And as Hilda stood there looking about her, Christopher came to her and put his arm round her and kissed her. She yielded gently, tears were in her eyes.

"It is good to be back again," she said.

The enchantment of the old house came down on them, it gathered them again into its peace.

They had been there a week. It was late afternoon, Christopher and Hilda were sitting in the drawing-room, the children were in the garden playing in the last of the light.

"They are going to be happy here," she said. Christopher was silent.

"When would you like Audrey to come down?"

"Never," he said.

"What—never?"

"No. I don't want her."

"You don't want her?"

"No, I want no one but you."

"Oh, Kit, is that true?"

"Yes. I didn't know it till I came down here. Now I know. Nothing matters but you and your happiness."

"But don't you care for Audrey any more?"

"No, not now. Something's happened to me. I don't care if I never see her again. She's

nothing to me. She never was. I can see that now."

"If you'd stayed in Hampstead she would have been."

"I daresay. But I'm not in Hampstead. I'm at Far End. It's the place, as if we had gone on and on from the beginning. It brings us back to what we were, when Maurice and Cecily were here; when there was no Audrey. She mustn't come here."

"Oh, Kit, then it's all over?"

"It's all over. Nothing was ever more over than it is. It'll never happen again."

"You've come back to me?"

"I've come back, if you'll have me, Hilda."

"If I'll have you—Oh, my dear, my dear."

"I've been a brute to you. But I never will be again. I couldn't be, here. I believe it's Far End that's brought us back again."

"Yes, it's been waiting for us, so patiently, all these years. Waiting to bring us back."

"It was more faithful than I."

"But we shall be faithful now. Do you

remember how we used to say that nobody could be anything but good and happy here ? ”

“ Yes, I remember. Yet we *were* unhappy here.”

“ But now all the unhappiness is gone, as if it had never been. Do you know, I feel as if Cecily and Maurice had never died, as if they were still here with us. I shall never be unhappy about them any more.”

“ I feel that, too.”

And they knew themselves again, they knew each other. No longer could they be hidden and secret, each from each. At last, after many years, Hilda possessed her husband's mind and soul, never to be taken away from her.

They had gone back far, they were back in the time of their first marriage, before the War, before Maurice and Cecily died. For with their coming to Far End the gap of time was filled, their present was joined on to their past, and all between was as though it had never been. Cecily moved in the house and garden, with her sweet face between the golden bosses of her

hair ; she played with Maurice there ; they heard their laughter. The War and Cecily's death and Maurice's, and all the pain, Richard's illness and the unhappy times at Hampstead, Mona and Audrey, had disappeared. They were no longer real. Far End stood shining and firm, most real among realities. The house was faithful. It remembered. It kept all their memories, made tender and sweet with time. It reconciled them and they were at peace. It brought them back to themselves and to each other ; back to reality, to love and trust and the good happiness of every day, to the kind and simple things that endure for ever.

They rose and went into the garden where the children still played.

THE END

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